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U.S. Department of the Interior Bureau of Land Management

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This document is primarily a direct transcript of the meeting, captured using voice-recording technology. Text in italics represents narrative; roman text is recorded speech during the meeting. Recorded text was edited to correct grammatical errors and ensure reading comprehension.

Wednesday, January 08, 2025

Welcome and Call to Order

Bryant Kuechle, Facilitator, The Langdon Group

Mr. Kuechle welcomed attendees to the Wild Horse and Burro Advisory Board meeting and introduced himself and his role as a neutral third-party facilitator.

Mr. Kuechle: Before we get started, I'm just going to go ahead and read the rules of the room one more time for everybody's awareness about the proceedings of today's meeting. The BLM and Forest Service recognizes the value of public attendance at its Wild Horse and Burro National Advisory Board meeting and appreciates the public interest in expressing themselves on matters of common concern.

Most of the meeting is designed as a working meeting of the Board with specific time slots set aside for public comment. Seating and presentation arrangements are primarily set for a Board meeting. The public is invited to the full meeting as observers, both in person and via webcam, which is how the majority of the public experiences the Board meetings.

The BLM and the Forest Service are designating the following rules of the room, both to ensure a smooth meeting for all engaged and to ensure clear sight lines for the webcam. Seating is available for all attendees. Anyone needing or wishing to stand will stand in the area behind the seats. All attendees are to stay in the seating or standing area at all times unless addressing the Board during the public comment.

Speakers and other attendees will not approach the dais at any time without prior consent from the chair of the meeting. Media will check in at the door and will be guided to the space designated for cameras. No attendees will be allowed to place microphones, cameras, or other equipment in the space set aside for Board meetings.

All attendees will show mutual respect for each other and for speakers and Board members. This includes refraining from using cell phones or talking while the meeting is in session. If anyone disrupts the meeting, you'll be asked to leave or be escorted out. Those wishing to address the Board will sign in at the door.

Speakers will address their comments to the Board while seated at the designated speaker table up front. Speakers have two minutes each and are asked to finish in the designated time to allow for the maximum number of individuals to express their viewpoints. We also are accepting comments online. Registration to provide comments virtually is full now. However, we do have space if you're here in Sacramento in person to sign up and provide comments during the designated comment time, which is at 9 A.M. today.

Attendees wishing to provide handouts to the Board will leave handouts with the BLM representative at the door. Handouts will not be brought to the speakers' table and no one will be allowed to approach the Board with handouts. Within the meeting room, attendees may not display signs, placards or other items that are likely to obscure the view of participants or disrupt the meeting.

The Board will not respond to comments made during the public participation period. This should not be interpreted to mean the members of the Board agree or disagree with anything said. The Chair reserves the right to comment on any factual inaccuracies that may be shared during the public comment period and the BLM commits to maintaining these rules for the benefit of all involved and appreciates everyone's cooperation with these rules.

And with that, I'll turn it over to our Board chair, Ms. Carlisle.

Honoring of Former Board Member Fred Woehl

The board introduced themselves and then read a series of poems that honored the former chair of the Wild Horse and Burro Advisory Board.

Ms. Carlisle: Thank you everybody. And again, we talked about it a little bit yesterday, but our fearless leader for a time was Fred Woehl as the Chair of the Advisory Board. I can't remember the years right now. They're all flying by, but we did lose Fred at the end of last year to an accident, and we think about him a lot. He was definitely a strong character and a very kind person.

So, Fred used to call us back from our breaks with a cowboy poem or two, always recited from memory and sometimes written by himself. The Board has attempted to write a poem about Fred in that same style. I'll admit we pale in comparison, but in thinking about Fred, who's pictured up on the screen right now, we just wanted a bit of a tribute.

We're not all reading, just some of us have written sections that knew Fred, and then Dr. Perryman has a short poem to read after us. So go ahead. For Fred, starting with Dr. Lenz.

Dr. Lenz, DVM: There was a fellow we knew from Arkansas. His face was burned deep by the sun. He was part patriot, part poet, and part cowboy, who loved to be where the wild horses run. Honest as the horses he loved with his hat and his dusty boots and his love for God's four-legged creatures, he was a true cowboy, clear down to his roots. He was a partner with horses, burros, and us. So, his praises we will always sing because he never sold his saddle, and that's an important thing.

Ms. Carlisle: I'm standing in, pretend I'm Dr. Sue McDonald. She writes, "Oh Fred, you simple old cowboy from Arkansas who, to my chagrin, insisted on me being Miss Sue and remember to change your ways. It took a few meetings and a sit-down or two. Well, now I'm not counting on heaven, but should it be true, I sure will be looking for you and you're blue, and should you spot me first would give anything to hear it again. Just holler out. 'Howdy, Miss Sue.'"

Ms. Carlisle: Me and Fred, we were at opposite ends of the spectrum, be it religion, politics, or personal introspection. But we trusted and enjoyed each other's incompatible ponderings, even if we disagreed in our political wanderings. Fred gave of himself in every circumstance, volunteering for wild horses at every chance. I fancy myself a real animals attribute, but it was Fred who would honestly contribute.

Commissioner French: Fred was a common man with uncommon values. Horses were his passion and mustangs his gurus. In wild places, habitats and landscapes needed equines, he recognized that the land and horse and cow must well align. Challenges were brought about by over populations, but Fred celebrated equine in all its forms and combinations. He pressed for healthy horses on healthy desert landscapes. The cowboy in him knew that we had made some management mistakes.

Ms. Pearson: Fred wrote to me, good grief. Fred wrote to me. When I joined the Board, it put a smile on my face knowing you'd be the one that would be taking my place. That's how Fred welcomed me to the post a positive word, the consummate host. We happened to share a similar outlook, but Fred also valued people with a different playbook. This was his secret weapon when it came to mentoring and we've gained from that good lesson. It's allowed us all some tempering.

Ms. McAlpine: This small Arizona town horse girl, Fred welcomed to a Board that was ever resourceful and utilized warmth and humor and unity to submit a political visiting opportunity. We were able to speak with some capital reps to talk about challenges and political steps. And after those meetings on the government subway, Fred and I hashed through a positive wild horse someday.

Commissioner Higbee: Fred will always be remembered for the love and care that he so rendered. For the wild horse he loves so much their health care and range as if God's own loving hand he did touch.

Ms. Carlisle: So, thank you to Fred from all of us, and Dr. Perryman now has an applicable poem to read.

Dr. Perryman, Ph.D.: For those of you that know me, occasionally something falls out of my pencil and this is one of those instances. This piece, I call it 69 Winters.

Zorro has come in from the rain. There will be no more jumping off the roof today. No sword fights with tall weeds, no swatting wasps with a stick. No saving the world. He'll have to be still for a while.

Casey Jones has come in from the rain. There'll be no more walking the rails today. No smashing pennies, no waving to the caboose man. No spikes, no creosote on his hands and knees. He'll have to be still for a while.

Wahoo has come in from the rain. There will be no more wrestling today. No shotgun shell whistles, no slingshots, no crabapple wars, no fishing, no sweaty dirt beads around his neck. He will have to be still for a while.

The cowboy has come in from the rain. There'll be no more riding today. No skinning elk, no taking naps under yellow aspen on a sunny fall morning. No smells of horses and leather and gunpowder. He'll have to be still for a while.

Yes, he will have to be still for a while. Thank you, Fred.

Ms. Carlisle: All right, thanks. Thank you, you guys. We do miss Fred for sure. All right, we'll roll right on into it, as Fred would've done right after a poem or two, session eight, which is Dr. Kane.

Update on the APHIS/BLM WHB Partnership

Dr. Albert Kane, DVM, MPVM, PhD, USDA

Dr. Kane, Ph.D.: Well, good morning. Those were great tributes to Fred. I'm sure he would've enjoyed them very much this morning. We're here to do the same business that we did when he was around, and my name's Al Kane. I'm a veterinarian and epidemiologist with the US Department of Agriculture, and I manage an interagency partnership between APHIS Veterinary Services and the BLM Wild Horse and Burro Program.

I've been at it part-time since 2001, full-time since 2003. I looked back on presentations and I don't know how many I've given to the Board, but I think I did my first one in probably 2004. And then I haven't seen you in the last few years, but it's good to be back. Thank you for the chance to share a little bit about our partnership.

And most of you know me and we've interacted in the past, but there's always new people around and including in the future. I'll jump right in. And today we're going to talk about a little bit of who APHIS is and how this fits into the partnership. Talk a little bit about the history, who, what, where and when is what epidemiologists like to talk about, and then I'll give you some examples of what we help BLM with on the range at gathers and facilities at adoptions. And then following adoption with compliance.

So, we call this the APHIS partnership because many years ago, if you just said veterinary services, it applied to half the names of veterinary practices in Nevada. So it was very confusing to people. The partnership was originally more at the APHIS level, but at this point, it's an inter-agency agreement with APHIS Veterinary Services, which is an agency of the Department of Agriculture.

We draw from different work groups in veterinary services. I'm in what's called the Surveillance and Preparedness Group, which has always been a headquarters group, but we draw heavily on our field operations group. We have about 200 veterinarians that could support the Program and work in veterinary services, a little over 200, I think.

And currently there's about 64 veterinarians who have BLM Wild Horse and Burro experience and training. And that means that that's the pool of people that I draw from when we task out different jobs within the partnership.

This started back in 1996. It was the brainchild of APHIS veterinarian, Katie Blunk, and BLM Joe Stratton in the beginning. Katie was a field VMO in Nevada and she was helping out locally before this was ever any sort of official partnership. And back when I joined in 2001, there were about six of us that did work very intermittently. Katie probably did one or two weeks of work a year with the BLM. There was a couple other field VMOs that did the same thing, primarily on gathers, helping with collecting genetic samples and just being available for consultation during the gathers. These agreements have gone by different formats since about 1999 when it was more formalized.

So that was the first MOU. Primarily, our role is to assist and consult with BLM on matters related to health and handling. Initially, the emphasis was on just that local support of field activity. We still try to keep the emphasis there, but of course, the larger something grows the more it needs coordination. So since two thousand-ish, we always had a national coordinator that helped BLM at that level with things like policy development related to animal health and handling.

So, the beauty of the inter-agency agreement is that it's a reimbursable agreement. BLM pays APHIS for the work that's done after the work is done, and we're very proud of the fact that that BLM pays the entire bill, that's salary, travel, supplies, per diems, overtime, what have you. That there's no money that is transferred as a lump sum, and therefore, there's no money that disappears into the Bureaucracy. So, that's the beauty of it being reimbursable. We send BLM a bill quarterly for the work that we do.

And what we provide for BLM is a national network of veterinarians with expertise in field work and equine work, and we also help with their national Program office or headquarters office. It offers APHIS an opportunity to get more engaged in the horse industry and to be engaged with land use as part of the agricultural world that we work in, particularly in the Western United States. Most importantly, it offers the animal a chance to enhance their care and their handling activity. I think the benefits for both agencies are sometimes subtle, but the benefits most obvious unfortunately when things go wrong in an animal health way, which happens when you're dealing with these large numbers.

So, we help in all components of the Program. When I explain the BLM Program to people, this is how I look at it. It starts on the range, then goes through the gather process. Animals are then moved into facilities, whether that's corrals or pastures. And then it moves into the adoption stage, the sale Program, followed by compliance activity and titling.

And of course, as I said, we help at the policy level advising it. We don't write policy, we don't create it, but we provide veterinary input for things related to animal health and handling. And as you can imagine, many policies touch on welfare, health and handling, including a handful, two or three, that are very much directly related to animal health and handling.

Those two parts are what I do at headquarters. As I just said, I also consult with facilities at times and I help with BLM's Wild Horse and Burro research team, as well as the Comprehensive Animal Welfare Program. The people doing field work primarily help with gathers and occasionally at facilities.

We do help individual wild horse and burro specialists in the field, and pretty much everybody at BLM at every level knows they can call me 24/7, and I answer the phone 24/7 if it rings and I have a signal. And I do get calls from facilities and field specialists with questions, which I'm always happy to help.

We're instrumental in the formation and development of the research team. Many years ago when USGS led the charge, the coordinator at that time was actually a USGS scientist, so that was some of my earliest involvement. Before I was

even official, I was reviewing things with them, and we've helped develop things like the CAWP Program and the auditing process. As I said, we provide gather support.

Many years ago, our primary support was compliance work. We used to do all the compliance work in the Eastern US. One of the advantages that we offer, or have, is we have veterinarians all over the United States and where BLM's personnel are concentrated out West, our personnel tend to be a little more concentrated in the Eastern and Central United States. We only have, I think, one or two VMOs in Nevada, for example. Whereas BLM has a host of horse specialists in Nevada.

But if they need help urgently or they need a consult in some place like Virginia or New York, where BLM doesn't have people stationed, we can usually wrangle up an APHIS veterinarian who either has a little bit of experience with the Program or can be briefed on it and is capable of just providing a veterinary opinion. One of the nice things is we're not local practitioners being paid by potentially an adopter or whatever, so we can render a little bit more of an independent opinion for BLM on animal care or especially for animals that are in trouble that we have to consult on.

We do also offer regulatory guidance to assist BLM in their compliance with state animal health regulations, but we play no regulatory role in this Program. We have no regulatory authority. We are merely advisors, which has always been kind an advantage for me.

It harkens back to the relationship a practitioner has with their client. The client asks you for your opinion, you share it. Whether they do what you say or not is up to them. You give them the best medical opinion you can. You try to stay in your lane. And that's the same thing with our partnership. We don't have regulatory authority or any other sort of role in the Program.

If you go back to the previous slide, I'm not sure I covered that. Maybe I did. You're right. I did. You can move on. Thanks.

When we start on the range, starting at about 2010, we started, at BLM's request, to put a veterinarian on every single helicopter gather. That was the start of a renewed emphasis on animal welfare, and before the CAWP Program was rolling, we helped organize some reviews of the Program in response to concerns for animal welfare as well as disease situations. In this process, we look and help with herd problems as well as individual problems.

They can call for a consultant on an individual horse on the range, and where they might not get a veterinarian to go out and spend a few hours looking for a horse, a private practitioner. Sometimes I'm available or one of our people is available. So, we help at that individual level all the way up to consultations that affect the entire Program. We also help triage emergencies at gathers.

We do still use private practitioners, of course, and all their facilities to do the clinical work. We also rely on private practitioners to back up our people for gather activity. If something needs medical treatment beyond what we can do as a triage process, then we can advise that they take that animal to a veterinary hospital or to a BLM facility for further evaluation and treatment as needed. We also assist with research projects in the application of fertility control.

I think over the years, we've reviewed things, I've been a co-investigator on a couple of research projects, and we're still open to that sort of activity.

All these things are as requested by BLM. We don't always say yes, but we don't inject ourselves too much. I inject myself a little bit because I basically serve as their staff veterinarian. I attend more staff meetings and more activity on BLM than I ever have with APHIS, so I'm one of their staff. But in general, the work that we do is at their request.

So at gathers, we're primarily there to observe and document what we see regarding animal care and handling. As I said, we consult on emergency care and triage, euthanasia. We facilitate compliance with their regulations and shipping in

particular, sometimes help smooth out the bumpy roads that happen when there's things like vesicular stomatitis that flare up and adjustments have to be made. We do consult and provide some emergency first aid, but we're not there doing clinical work typically. That's referred to private practitioners.

We help develop the CAWP Program and certainly we serve. I serve on the audit team, and we've now begun calling on other APHIS veterinarians to help with CAWP audits as well to broaden the base of APHIS veterinarians that can help in different areas.

In 2024 on gathers in particular, as I said, back in the early 2000s, mid-2000s, compliance was 80-90% of what we did other than the national consultations and advisor role, and today things have switched. We hardly do any compliance work at all unless they need a second opinion or an opinion on an urgent situation. And now the emphasis is on the activity at gathers.

Last fiscal year, we had 33 different veterinarians who spent 55 weeks in the field on 22 different gathers in eight different states. And one of the things that, because we don't have a real big field force in places like Nevada or Wyoming, one of the things that we discussed and BLM agreed to is we need to be able to bring veterinarians in from all over the country to work those gathers. Because obviously the bulk of the work is Nevada, Wyoming, etc., where we have the fewest veterinarians.

We bring veterinarians in from the Carolinas, Tennessee, Florida, Alaska. We have one working right now in Nevada from Alaska, which is actually, I think an easier trip than Florida. But we pull from a pool, as I said, of about 65 different veterinarians. We spent six weeks doing CAWP audits with Jerry and the CAWP auditing team. Most of those were myself, but we have started using some other APHIS field veterinarians to help with CAWP audits as well.

We have about 14 veterinarians that work doing off range pasture inspections in the Plains States primarily. But this goes from Washington State to Utah all the way through the Plains States to Iowa, and they did about 35 off range pasture inspections in the accompaniment of the BLM project inspectors. So that's something that by design, we try to get an APHIS veterinarian to every pasture to assess animal welfare and animal health at least once a year. The project inspectors visit those facilities multiple times a year. One of those we call the APHIS visit, and that includes a veterinarian.

We did about four different training sessions for BLM specialists during fiscal year 2024. Probably did a couple more than that, but that's the ones I could find on my calendar.

I'll give you another example of the kind of things that we help with in facilities. We don't do routine clinical work in facilities. That's done under contract with private practitioners, but we do assist with problem investigations and providing a second opinion or a consult to those practitioners.

There's times when I know about what's going on in the Program in Nevada, whereas a facility veterinarian working in Oklahoma may not know that there's a strangles outbreak or a pigeon fever issue somewhere else in the Program. And so, sometimes it's just knowing the big picture that helps in those consults. And sometimes it's just you have experience with these large numbers of horses and facilities, and if a new practitioner is involved, they're not accustomed to dealing with some of those things.

So sometimes I have the knowledge to help them, and sometimes what I do is just put them in touch with other practitioners from other facilities that have been doing this for 20, 30 years. And then they talk amongst themselves to work out details of how they might address certain situations, for example, anesthesia that works best for castrating wild horses and burros.

We help with things like mortality reviews, looking at infectious disease problems. We're on a lot of TPEC committees that involve health or welfare issues. As I said, we assist with off-range pasture visits. Facility design is something that we

used to get involved when haven't done so much lately, but when new facilities are open, there's usually a walkthrough done by BLM, and I've been involved in some of those walkthroughs just to look at things before they open up.

We used to be active at adoption. This activity has decreased over the years a little bit. We did a lot of educational Programs. When they did training demonstrations, oftentimes we would do a little animal health presentation, whether that's on hoof care or vaccinations or that sort of thing. Still open to doing this. It's just a shift in the workload and availability, depending on what BLM requests and what we have the time for.

As I said, we also did compliance work years ago, checking on adoptive homes where BLM had more limited resources. BLM always organized it and was in control of it. We would take the compliance training with their field specialists, and then if there was a problem, basically we would refer it back to BLM for their involvement. If we didn't see any problem with animal care or welfare, then it was kind a clean bill of health for that compliance check, and that was counted towards the ones that BLM could complete through partners.

BLM also started using more volunteer partners in places, which is a little more efficient than calling on our people. They're doing a lot more of them themselves in person. That's good.

We respond to changes in the Program the best we can as requested. Some of this is repetitive, so I'm going to skip over it. 2010, as I say, we shifted a lot of the focus onto gather activities. 2014, in that period of time, we had an influx of animal health consultations at facilities, and today the emphasis is really more focused on welfare and helping BLM engage their social license to operate. And I think that's something that we need to probably talk about a little more in the future. That phrase is a new one for the equine industry, but it's starting to get more play in many parts of the equestrian world. I think it's all well and good to quote our regulatory authorities, but the fact is that that doesn't carry a lot of weight with a lot of people. What we need to be able to do is demonstrate that we can maintain and improve a social license to operate. And its sort of a fancy term for the red face test, but to me it means doing the right thing by the animals. I think that's a big part of what we're there to help with; understanding that we're working in the context of a government Program that is controlled by federal regulations and we have an assignment and a mission to complete. We have to work within those parameters.

And as we look into the future, we're in pretty good standing. We're currently three and a half years into a five-year agreement. The annual spending on that agreement varies depending on the workload. In a really busy gather year, like 2022, we can spend as much as \$700,000 a year. In a slow year where we only gather 5,000-6,000 horses, we may only spend \$300,000-350,000 a year. The beauty is that there's no chunks of money that disappear into the Bureaucracy. And BLM has requested that we renew the agreement early because of some sort of software management changes in the way things are structured with agreements. We're going to need to do a new agreement before July of 2025 so that we have good continuity of service into the future. I thought we had another year and a half before we had to do a new one, but we will have to do a new one before the gather season starts and before we reach the end of this fiscal year.

In the future, as I said, we plan to continue to assist the Program as requested and whenever possible.

And I'll answer questions. Happy to do that for the Board.

Ms. Carlisle: Okay. I have a question to start us off. You talked about training sessions that you all participate in for BLM horse specialists. What are the types of things that you've all had training in?

Dr. Kane, Ph.D.: One of the things that I do is I participate in the range management class that BLM takes, and offers I think every two years down at the training center. Some of those are BLM-sponsored trainings that are much bigger than an animal health component, but there's always a health or handling or welfare component built into those. I provide the training on the euthanasia policy for all the horse specialists, which includes when they're authorized and guided to provide euthanasia and also how to do it on the nuts and bolts of how to euthanize a horse by gunshot. I provide that training on request to anyone in the BLM.

Most of it is small parts of bigger training courses, whether that be for range management or facility management or that sort of thing. We do topical updates if there's like a vesicular stomatitis outbreak or we've done a little bit of discussion of avian influenza and what that means for horses, what that means for agriculture because it's in the news. So anytime there's something like that that potentially affects the people out in the field managing these horses, we try to give timely updates and that sort of thing.

We also help with when they do have compliance training courses or whatnot, we always had a role in those trainings.

Ms. Carlisle: And then can you talk through what your role is or any of the APHIS vets that are on site at a gather when there's some sort of incident. How do you all insert into that? Or is there an incident review that the veterinarians participate in and how is that done?

Dr. Kane, Ph.D.: When we're at a gather, we report to the CORs on the gather. The way gathers are structured, the contracting officer's representative, there's an IC that oversees things, but the contracting officer's representative is there directing the operation in that sense. And so just like the gather contractor, we report to the CORs. CORs do things differently. Some of us want us stationed at the holding corral.

Some of us want us stationed at the holding so it's a little bit flexible. Sometimes it goes back and forth. Sometimes it depends on the lay of the land. If there's a two-hour drive between the trap and the holding corral, you can't be in both places at once. You start out at the holding corral when they're shipping, when shipping's over, you go to the trap for a few hours and before the end of the day, you go back to the holding corral so you can inspect all the horses and look at them.

Everything we do is on request. And if a CORs wants us to examine a horse to do some aging for them, they just have to ask. And as long as it's within our lane in our comfort zone, we can help out that way. So as far as incident reviews and that sort of thing, that's entirely up to BLM. We don't control any of that. We don't direct it, but we participate on teams of people that do that sort of thing. As I said, we have no authority. It's funny because people some of our people are inspectors and they're used to having an authority and a clipboard and some of them have a badge and they want to know their authority. And occasionally they call me up and they go, "I'm not sure what to do here. Tell me again what my authority is." And I say, "Oh, that's really simple. You have no authority."

You are an advisor. You are a consultant. Make yourself useful, make yourself helpful, and they will ask for your opinion and look for it. And basically, you're oftentimes on standby. If everything's running smooth, they may not need your opinion or help on anything, but if there are bumps in the road conditions with certain animals, we're there to help.

The beauty of it is when you're really making yourself useful and helpful and they start to recognize that, then they really start asking for your opinion and they all do it. We do fit into the incident command structure, but I very happily take questions from the director of BLM all the way down to range cons, who aren't horse specialists but have some horse duties or what have you. Any one of them can call me. And on a gather, it's usually the cowboys and the contractors.

"Hey doc, look at this over here. What do you think of that?" When I'm going to a gather, I have 20 sets of eyes looking at things and helping me look for things to examine. They catch a lot more than I can. They're closer to the horses. We're back out of the way. I tell our people, "I don't want you in the zone where you're affecting their movement and that sort of thing." You back out of the way, but they're very quick to call you up front if they see a need.

I don't know if that answers your question?

Ms. Carlisle: No, no, it does. And as a member of an advocacy group, and the general public, my impression was different. I think of the veterinarians on site. It's this catch all comfort zone of like, okay, the veterinarians have it under control, but it seems like it could be, and I absolutely understand the reason and the necessity of an incident command system or structure. I can't remember, especially in situations like that. It's not perfect in terms of the veterinarian's role, but I wonder if there's a way to make the veterinarian's role ever more robust because that is our welfare net.

Dr. Kane, Ph.D.: I'll tell you, you can supervise and police and use a stick or you can use education and help people recognize when things work better and more smoothly and use a team approach to that. And I really think the first one only works about half the time and we don't have regulatory authority and we're not likely to look for it. This Program is BLM's responsibility, and because we partner with them, there's all kinds of clauses in the agreement we take on none of that responsibility financially or in any other sort of way as far as the Bureaucracy goes. I think it works better if we are a team member and we're there staying in our lane of animal care. And when our people in the field get sort of lost as to what to do and they get distracted by things, I say, "Look, if they didn't teach it in veterinary school, you don't have an opinion on it."

Our role is not how to fly a helicopter or where the trap should be located. BLM are the experts in that, and their contractors are expert in that. I always say, does it come back to animal health and handling or welfare? If it does, you have an opinion on it, you can volunteer some of that. But for the most part, when they need our input, they'll ask for it. And I think the team approach to things like incident review and that sort of thing is much more powerful than some sort of outside entity sort of supervising, if you will.

That's certainly not the role we are interested in.

Ms. Carlisle: Dr. Perryman.

Dr. Perryman, Ph.D.: Yeah, it seems to me like it is not vastly different between a pet owner and their veterinarian. The veterinarian can't tell them, you have to do this, you have to give this animal a pill. But you can advise them if you don't give this animal a pill at such and such a time on such and such a day with this regularity, this is what's going to happen to them. It's not vastly different from that.

Dr. Kane, Ph.D.: It's not, and I'll say with all veterinarians, I mean sometimes it's frustrating. Sometimes it's frustrating when people don't follow your advice. You go out to see a sick cow and you give them a bottle and you say, give them 20 cc of this twice a day and I'll come back and check on him next week. And you come back next week and there's only 40 cc is missing from the bottle and the cow isn't any better and, "Doc, you're not making my cow better."

Dr. Perryman, Ph.D.: But that's not your personal experience with the Bureau.

Dr. Kane, Ph.D.: Well, no.

Dr. Perryman, Ph.D.: Let's get that out in the open now.

Dr. Kane, Ph.D.: But I won't say that they always follow my advice and sometimes that's frustrating. But I think most of the time, again, if you're making yourself truly useful and demonstrating to them how you can help with their mission and with their assignment, then they learn to value your advice and they follow it more. So it's not different than most pet owners or cow owners or horse owners. It can be a little frustrating at times, but the government can be a frustrating place to work sometimes.

Mr. Kuechle: We had a couple of questions online. Ms. McAlpine, and Mr. Higbee did have his hand up, so he may still have a question.

Commissioner Higbee: I just have a couple of questions. One of them has been answered pretty much about the role of the veterinarian to gathers. The other one was, when you bring veterinarians in across state lines in different areas, do you have to certify them in that state or can you just do that?

Dr. Kane, Ph.D.: Yeah, that's a good question. As federal veterinarians, we are not required to be licensed to practice in the states that we work in. So as long as it's within the scope of our role as a USDA employee and a federal veterinarian,

we're not required to be licensed in every state. I go and consult and our people consult on avian influenza outbreaks all over the country and we bring hundreds of people from all over the country into places where there are disease outbreaks like that. And under most of those situations, we're not licensed in every state. Most of us, including myself, are licensed in some states, but that's also not required as a federal veterinarian.

Commissioner Higbee: With running the risk here, being offensive. I know I sat yesterday and I listened to all the testimony that was given, and I've been to some of the gathers. I understand that things happen that are out of the gatherer's control, but I think as this Board what we need to ask, is there any way that these incidents that we're being accused of that are horrific that they point out and they put them all together in one video and they show them and they put them out there for the public and now you've put out misinformation because in the reality those incidents are far and few between. Is there any way that that type of thing can be mitigated to where it's shown for the reality of it for what it really is that the incidents don't happen 50 times in one gather that it's far and few between that those types of infringements on the animals take place.

Dr. Kane, Ph.D.: So yeah, I'll give you an example. In a rare effort to stay in my lane, I'll sort of look to being an epidemiologist. And one of the things that you are probably including in your incidents as catastrophic injuries that occurred during gathers, and I think it's important as an epidemiologist to look at those in the context of how many animals you're gathering and what type of animals you're gathering. One of the things I've done in my career is kept track of every gather I've ever been on, how many horses were captured, how many horses were injured and that sort of thing. And my personal observation is that a fatal injury or a mortality, fatal injury occurs in about half of 1% of the animals that are gathered and a euthanized animal from a pre-existing condition such as an old fracture that occurred on the range or a limb deformity, that's about three quarters of a percent.

So overall you have about one and a quarter to one and a half percent of animals that are euthanized or die on a gather. And I think if you look at activities like wild animal captures, you'll find that that number is extremely low. There's very few other large ungulates that are captured in this quantity anywhere in the world really. I've talked to capture experts from Africa and other places, and they go on and on about their methods and how they work. And I say, "Well, that's great. How many of those can you capture in a day?" And they say, "Well, we've captured 25 or 30." And I said, "That's awesome. We got 3000 to catch next month."

And they sort of can't relate to that. But the point is that we are capturing thousands of wild animals and unfortunately despite your best preparations, accidents will occur. I think the key is to not get hardened to them, to the point where you're not always striving to minimize those accidents and those things. I frequently point out and emphasize that of all the mortalities that are discussed, the vast majority of them are not accidental. They're animals that are euthanized from pre-existing conditions. And it's shocking sometimes to veterinarians. They say, "I've practiced on horses for 20 years." I guarantee you, you go catch 3000 mustangs and you'll see something you've never seen before because things happen out on the range and bizarre things come in with deformities and that sort of a thing. And some of it's not preventable. I think we work hard to try and prevent those things.

As far as the videos and all that, that's out of my lane. I leave that to public affairs experts, and I know that's a challenge. I know the timeliness of reporting is a challenge, but I promise to sort of stay in my lane. My focus and the way I guide our people is when in doubt, look at the animal in front of you, assess its health, and that's our role and report back to BLM on that aspect of it.

As an epidemiologist, numbers are my game, so I do look at the data and that sort of thing, but how you communicate that, BLM does communicate all that information in gather reports for every gather. They give a description of every animal that dies and that sort of thing. And that's all stuff that we helped build together over the last 20 years or so to be transparent and to share that information with the public.

The nuts and bolts of social media interactions, I don't even know how to do it personally and I don't do much of it, so I can't even go there. Not my lane. I don't like the phrase, that's not my job because you should sort of pick up and help. But I like the phrase, it's not my lane.

Commissioner Higbee: I guess my question to this Board would be how do we as a Board, us as Wild Horse and Burro Commissioners, how do we get that reality check and get that to the public? There's not so much misinformation coming back to us on our feedback through all the testimony we sat and listened to yesterday.

Ms. Carlisle: I appreciate that. I'm certainly one that, and I'm not speaking about any particular incident, but I'm certainly one that is hesitant and doesn't follow and frankly doesn't believe in social media. Don't get me started. But I think what's more important, we're never going to control that, it's Pandora's box. It's occurring, but I think what we can do is like Dr. Kane is saying, don't get hardened to it. I think efforts like Jerry's work continuing to refine the Comprehensive Animal Welfare Program and the self-auditing, essentially auditing, it's not officially auditing I guess yet. That's just the first step. And then outside experts are called in, and then little tweaks are made throughout the Program and you just put forward the attitude that refinement will continue to occur, lessons will continue to be learned and BLM will continue to train and work with their CORs to mitigate these things through how gathers are done. And I don't know that there's more we can do as a Board especially. We can sort of guide that these are big concerns and they're valid even though they don't happen often, especially statistically. But we always do better and we always encourage that mantra throughout the Program.

Mr. Kuechle: Celeste, we have two hands online, I think Ms. McAlpine's first and then Mr. Lenz. We do have our public comment in five minutes, which we want to stick as close to that as possible, but it's okay if we and spill over a little bit.

Ms. Carlisle: Let's have Dr. Perryman respond and then we'll kick it to Ms. McAlpine.

Dr. Perryman, Ph.D.: Short point before we move to probably another subject. I agree with Chairman Carlisle. The point is that the Board needs to make sure that the Bureau brings as much professionalism to their jobs as possible. We try to do that as a Board, and the Bureau I know tries to do that, and I'm not justifying, we are trying to bring a sense of justification about anything that might happen, this 1% or one and a half percent mortality that we have. But when you do get into wildlife, I know some of the literature that I've read with bighorn sheep for instance, it's upwards of 5-6% mortality, at least when they're capturing Bighorn sheep. So comparatively speaking, I think the professionalism that the Bureau brings to these gathers, it is a continual process, a continual learning process, but the idea is to bring as much professionalism and expertise to the activity as possible. The Board certainly urges the BLM to continue that and the Forest Service as well to continue that effort. So yes, thank you,

Ms. Carlisle: Susan.

Ms. McAlpine: I'm going to kind of jump into this a little bit. We had a discussion with a group of people about this just-in-time transparency issues that all this stuff hits the media within minutes, if not hours, and what people need to understand that. I was told, and Dr. King can confirm that, but our BLM staff and APHIS veterinarians do not leave the site. And because our gather sites are in very, very rural areas, there is no technology, there is no phone service, there is no internet. And in order to have just-in-time transparency, somebody from staff would need to leave to go to someplace that has technology. It is a benefit to our animals, our gatherers, and our staff, and it's a little bit of a detriment when you start talking about social media and how quickly some of the stuff appears.

Ms. Carlisle: Was there someone else online? I can't see this screen.

Mr. Kuechle: Dr. Lenz. Go right ahead.

Dr. Lenz, DVM: Yeah. In response to Varlin's comment, this is not unusual. Anytime that you deal with animals, we see it, a lot of misinformation and emotion. When you look at domestic livestock production or racing or show horses or rodeo, there's always a huge amount of misinformation put out by certain groups that want to stop those. And we've dealt with this through the years on the domestic horse side by trying to be as transparent as possible to explain what happens and why it happens and what we're doing about it. I think we constantly review how we care for and manage animals, and we find situations where we probably could do a better job. We change how we do things. You will never affect that small group of people that usually are ill-informed or not knowledgeable, but they have a strong opinion. You will never affect

them, but the general population, you can dramatically affect how they view how things are done as long as you're transparent and honest with them.

And that's what we're trying to do here with these horses. I think it gets frustrating because it's hard to see that you're making progress because you're constantly listening to the group that are opposed to everything you're doing. But I think as long as you're honest and you're transparent and you're constantly striving to improve, that's about all you can do.

Commissioner Higbee: Thanks, Tom.

Ms. Carlisle: Thanks everybody. In interest of time and that it is public comment time and folks are waiting online, I'll go ahead and let that session happen now.

Mr. Kuechle: Great, thanks Celeste. Yeah, let's take just a short break, five minutes.. That allows our public commenters to join the unique link that was emailed to you if you're providing comment virtually, and for our BLM and Board members that are online, to switch over to the other zoom link that you have for public comment, and we pick that up here in five minutes beginning with our in-person. We have two people signed up for in-person comment. We'll do those first and then we'll move to online.

Public Comment Period (2)

Bryant Kuechle, Facilitator, The Langdon Group

Mr. Kuechle welcomed the Board and members of the public back to the meeting. He then went over the rules for public comment, either virtually or in person.

In Person Comments

There were no in-person commentators. Mr. Kuechle moved on to virtual comments.

Virtual Comments Provided over Zoom

Tessa Archibald

Thank you. Good morning. My name is Tessa Archibald and I'm an equine policy associate with the Animal Welfare Institute. I also manage the Homes for Horses Coalition, a network of over 500 equine rescues and sanctuaries across the country. Many Homes for Horses Coalition members take in wild horses as they often end up in situations that leave them at risk for abuse, neglect, or slaughter, an issue that is exacerbated by the AIP. Some adopted BLM horses end up in the hands of uneducated or malicious owners, or at sale barns and kill pens.

The Adoption Incentive Program does not support horses into loving, safe placement. Instead, it incentivizes bad actors to get into the wild horse adoption business, flipping horses for profit. The AIP is taken advantage of and provides an easy avenue for exploitation with the cash incentive. If the BLM would like to continue to incentivize adoption, they should do so by investing in the horses not in the owners through veterinary vouchers.

This sort of voucher program would prioritize equine health, including vaccines, dentals, and emergency care. While I have your time, I also feel it's important to touch on the issue of fertility control, which I appreciate was mentioned yesterday. I'm in Colorado and I'm on the Colorado Wild Horse Working Group, and we have some of the most active fertility control Programs in the country, which will hopefully be expanded further in the coming years thanks to the state investment and the working group.

On average, about 300 fertility control treatments are applied across our four Colorado HMAs each year. That means Colorado represents 42% of the 720 treatments BLM reported in FY23. However, Colorado hosts about 2% of the total wild horse population. That means only 420 fertility control treatments were applied for 98% of the country's wild horse population, which in 2023 was well over 65,000 horses. The BLM has an opportunity to significantly increase the application of humane reversible fertility control, namely PCP in HMAs across the West. Thank you for your time.

Joanna Grossman

Thank you. My name is Dr. Joanna Grossman, and I am the equine Program director for the Animal Welfare Institute. As one of the nation's oldest animal protection groups, AWI has advocated for the humane stewardship of our nation's herd since the 1950s. With over 66,000 federally protected wild equines in captivity, we implore the BLM to explore novel solutions to the exorbitantly expensive and endless cycle of rounding up horses and funneling them into holding facilities. Keeping horses on the range should be the priority from a welfare standpoint, a cost efficiency calculus, and according to the agency's mandate under law.

We have stressed at length the importance of undertaking a proactive approach to fertility control, but additionally, the BLM should consider redesignating HMA boundaries, initiating land swaps and converting HAs back to HMAs as appropriate, i.e. raising the AML up from zero where conditions can support the presence of herds.

Wild horses have lost over 22 million acres of land that they once had available. This ever-dwindling trajectory is unsustainable for horses to be managed successfully. Troublingly, in its budget request for FY25, the BLM included a staggering 15 million for a permanent sterilization program. We asked the agency to be transparent as to how it is spending the sum and what these plans entail. As the agency is aware, there was significant public outcry, as well as opposition from lawmakers and veterinarians to the agency's proposed use of gruesome surgical sterilizations in the last few years. There was a strong dissonance between a willingness to devote 15 million towards an amorphous permanent sterilization program while the agency administered a paltry 720 treatments of PCP and GonaCon in FY23. In that same period, thousands of wild equines were removed from the range.

Congress is on track to appropriate somewhere on the order of 143 million for wild horse management for FY25, so we sincerely hope the BLM will use these funds to adopt a proactive, humane and sensible approach towards managing our nation's federally protected wild horses. Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments today and for the Board's time.

Tammi Adams

Okay, thank you. It's Tammi with an I, Tammi Adams. I'm with Wild Horse Education. BLM was directed by federal law almost 40 years ago to create HMAPs. Without HMAPs, there's no way to infer or mitigate impacts to wild horses and burros from other multiple uses. BLM's Wild Horses and Burro Handbook clearly states that management is provided under an HMAP rather than an RMP. AMLs were defined in the early seventies and eighties and then carried forward for administrative convenience, not based on actual science nor data.

There is absolutely no research on the impacts of fertility control on wild burros and therefore should be discontinued until researched and reported. BLM does not take into account how fertility control impacts fowling seasons and hence the legality of helicopter roundups is questionable. Mitigation of habitat and resources lost to wild horses and burros from other multiple uses is directed under federal law and BLM's mitigation handbook 1794.

To date, not one blade of grass nor one drop of water lost to wild horses and burros from other multiple uses like mining, livestock and urbanization has been mitigated. Why does the Forest Service utilize habitat management plans for other free-moving ungulates but not wild horses and burros? This Board now includes a wild horse and burro research specialist who can provide BLM direction on the differences between wild horses and burros, including amendments to COP to provide humane handling, capture, and holding specifically for wild burros. I respectfully request that the Advisory Board

urgently recommend that BLM comply with their directive to manage our wild horses and burros on the range with provision of HMAPs.

In closing, Joe Gaydos, science director of SeaDoc at UC Davis stated this month that Orca J35 demonstrated, and I quote, "Grief and mourning over the death of her newborn calf observed twice since 2018." Wild horses and burros certainly suffer the same grief and mourning from their loss of family and way of life as these massive BLM roundups continue without public redress.

Rebecca Falk

Hi, my name is Rebecca Falk, and I'm an American citizen, and I care about wild horses and burros. I recommend that BLM gets a welfare policy and enforces it. Last year, 2024, as other years, helicopter rounds were terrible. They were rushed, which endangered wild horses and burros. Helicopters are way too loud. There's a roundup where they use two helicopters, which is totally cruel. They're also, as I said before, too loud. They also scare wild horses and burros. Helicopters should never be used to go after prey animals. The use of helicopters was added a few years after the 1971 Protection Act, so if it was added, it can certainly be removed.

Helicopter roundups are not working and are not the way. They are cruel and unjust. Instead, focus on fertility control, PCP only, is going to call and sterilize the horses after just a couple of applications as well as other ones. Also, BLM really needs to listen to the public and listen to their comments.

In 2024 alone, the McCollough wild horses and the Little Brooks Cliff, which actually Little Brooks, Colorado, have been using PCP and showing a great example for fertility control. They were over the AML just a little bit and instead of just watching the horses to see if they're going to lose any over the winter, they were both captured. The Little Brooks Cliff was captured by helicopters, which actually goes against the Colorado rule and then McCollough's was bait and trap. That's both unfortunate and unnecessary. They still had roundups of these horses as BLM said. Okay, sorry. I have been watching what is happening to our wild horses and burros over years, and I see that BLM needs to change their way. Roundups in general need to be stopped and worked with horse groups in the area on fertility control, PCP only, and adjust the HMAs for wild horses. The AML maybe should be increased. That needs to be a study. I mean, wild horses should be out there. I want to see wild horses, not cattle and mining on our public lands. Thank you.

Laurie Ford

Morning, Laurie Ford, Wild Horse Education. During the last two Board meetings, I discussed the deaths of pregnant captured Jennies, all confirmed to have been in good health, a direct result of the stress, physical exertion and associated complications experienced during and after capture. These capture-related stressors lead to both hyperlipidemia and capture myopathy. A cause of morbidity widely recognized in the wildlife world involves too much fat circulating and causing obstructions in the bloodstream, clogging organs and damaging muscles, especially heart muscles that can lead to a heart attack.

While hyperlipidemia may get listed as a cause of death, capture myopathy is never acknowledged and may get listed as unknown colic or simply found dead, a common cause listed by adopters. Both illnesses can manifest and cause death after the initial event often triggered by further stress or another illness. Both hyperlipidemia and capture myopathy are gather-related and resulting deaths must be recorded as such in the database and in gather mortality statistics as they do with other wildlife. In 2022, 6.7% of Jennys captured at the Blue Wing Roundup died from hyperlipidemia. In 2024, the number doubled to 12.24%.

This was when they conducted a roundup without a follow-up aerial survey from the initial roundup and with an estimated population of only 476 burros on over two million acres of land with an AML of 50 to 90 burros. As far as some other stuff. Off range reports should decipher horse and burro data, especially since there are no recognized off range pastures

for burros. Five new public private partnership agreements did not include any specific to burros. The only place burro appeared under current research projects was horse and burro genetic monitoring.

Mr. Kuechle: Thank you, Laurie. We're going to move on to Sandra Holloway followed by Nicole Nielsen. So Sandra, you should be able to unmute yourself and begin when you're ready.

Ms. Sandra Holloway: Thank you. I want to thank the Board for listening to all the comments. The Commissioner mentioned this morning that he's concerned about social media, and the chairman was quick to add that she doesn't believe "in social media." It's a reality. It's how the general public is able to discern just a small part of what really happens out there on the range. If you want to know exactly what happens out there on the range, I request today that the Board recommend that cameras be used on helicopters, on cowboys, on the veterinarian that's on site because he's not able to speak unless you ask him a question.

He testified to that, that APHIS can only act when they are asked a question. If there are things happening on the range that you guys want to know about that can affect policy in the future, then cameras should be used and that data should be unedited and made available to the public immediately upon its being recorded.

At the end of the day, somebody takes their satellite telephone and they upload that to the federal website and then you and I and Joe and Susie and Jack can all see exactly how the animals are treated. And that's all. I said a bunch yesterday, and I appreciate you letting me speak a second day. Thank you all.

Nicole Nielsen

All right, thank you for the opportunity to provide comments today. I'm Nicole Nielsen with Utah Public Land Policy Coordinating Office. First of all, I just want to thank the Board for all of your work, all of your effort. Utah really appreciates it. The work that you do, gathering all this information considering public comments, it's valuable to sustainable management, wild horses and burros and to providing healthy watersheds, so thank you for that. Our office PLIPCO is dedicated to promoting, coordinating and implementing Utah's public land priorities. Utah is home to some of the most spectacular public lands in the world.

We support 19 HMAs, all of which are over AML. Ranges over AML negatively affect all of us from declining watershed health to reduced wildlife populations. A range can only feed so many mouths. When HMAs exceed their population objectives, it impacts wildlife, populations, livestock operations, and all other multiple uses.

Utah is committed to helping provide support to find solutions to wild horse and burro issues like the continued population growth through fertility treatments, supporting planning and implementation of rangeland gathers and looking for outside the box alternatives to overcrowding and holding facilities. Utah supports and is an active participant with groups like the Path Forward and FREES, the Free Roaming Equids and Ecosystem Sustainability network. That's a mouthful. And the strategies and partnerships that they've developed. We encourage the BLM to use these and coordinate with the state, Path Forward, and FREES. Thanks for this opportunity. I appreciate it.

Amelia Perrin

Hi, my name is Amelia. I'm with American Wild Horse Conservation. I'm here today to talk about the BLM's adoption incentive Program, which is sending truckloads of wild horses and burros into the slaughter pipeline. Despite evidence of fraud and abuse, the BLM continues to fail to reform this Program. AWHC's work has documented over 2000 wild horses and burros in self-described kill pens since the start of the AIP. And even worse than that, we've identified groups of related individuals defrauding the AIP system and commercially exploiting wild horses and burros.

One such group adopted 82 animals, received \$82,000 of taxpayer incentives and then sent their wild horses and burros into the slaughter pipeline. I'm sure you've heard countless times that there is no evidence of wild horses and burros

entering the slaughter pipeline and the fact is that the BLM is right. It has no evidence of this, not because the evidence isn't there, but because the agency refuses to acknowledge it.

We provided investigative reports backed by the agency's own records obtained through FOIA to the BLM, to Congress and to the New York Times. Our findings were affirmed by the Times front-page report and sparked calls for change in both the House and the Senate. If this evidence was enough for both of these entities to see the need for change, why isn't it for the BLM? In 2022, I participated in a BLM-commissioned collaborative working group. The consensus from that group was clear, get the cash out of the equation, instead offer veterinary vouchers.

Yet three years later, these recommendations remain unreleased to the public. According to its presentation to the Board, yesterday, the BLM offered nearly 30,000 wild horses and burros for adoption or sale. Only 4,900 were titled. It's simple math. The AIP isn't even incentivizing enough adoptions to address the holding crisis the agency has created thanks to its reliance on roundups and holding over the implementation of fertility control.

Given this, I'm asking the Board to recommend the BLM substantially reform the AIP by providing non-cash incentives to adopters. In addition, I ask them to recommend the BLM release the findings of the collaborative working group to the public. Thank you.

Carol Walker

Okay, great. I'm Carol Walker. I live in Longmont, Colorado. I'm not affiliated with any group. I have been following the wild horses in the Checkerboard area in Wyoming, Adobe Town, Salt Wells Creek, White Mountain, Great Divide Basin for 20 years. And this recent revision of the resource management plan that is serving to zero out Great Divide Basin and Salt Wells Creek and a large portion of Adobe Town, even though only 10,000 acres are in the checkerboard is wrong, and it's illegal and it needs to be reversed. These wild horses are on our public lands. 1.15 million acres of this land where the horses are is public land, and the BLM deciding that they get to eliminate all wild horses from public land as well as private land is not legal.

I ask that the Board recommend that this decision be reversed and that these horses be able to remain in their legal wild horse areas. There should have been land swap exchanges done to consolidate the areas of public land. The other issue I wanted to bring up briefly is euthanizing all the wild horses and holding.

This is clearly something that is being looked at or it would not have been in Project 2025. I strongly oppose any attempt to kill the over 60,000 wild horses in holding. Thank you for listening, and I appreciate being on the comments.

Meredith Hou

Good morning. My name is Meredith Hou, and I'm a director of federal legislation for the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of humane and sustainable management of wild horses and burros. My comments today focus on the critical area of on-range management strategies and solutions. Fertility control is a vital tool for stabilizing wild horse and burro populations. With robust administration, fertility control can save the agencies millions of dollars in avoided gather and holding costs.

On that note, we applaud the BLM's recent creation of the Fertility Control Coordinator position that will allow the agency to expand its fertility control efforts nationally. We expect that new coordinator will allow the BLM to significantly increase the use of currently available safe, humane, and effective fertility control treatments and are eager to see the benefits to the Program as a whole. To assist the person in this critical role, we strongly encourage the agency to invest in a team of individuals to include existing and new personnel.

We also strongly advise the agency to incorporate fertility control metrics in both its short-term and long-term plans to ensure the agency remains on track towards administering a robust fertility control program. The ASPCA continues to

support a four-pronged management strategy that requires one, sustained BLM commitment to on-range fertility control, two, strategic removals that strictly and faithfully adhere to the comprehensive animal welfare Program, three, additional humane off-range pastures and four, responsible adoptions to good homes. We encourage the Board to continue to advise the BLM on how the agency can further build towards a humane and science-backed Program. Thank you again for the opportunity to speak today.

Cassie Sather

Thank you. My name is Cassie Sather, and I live in North Idaho. I'm just a regular citizen. I don't have any rehearsed remarks. I just want to thank the Advisory Board for your work. Thank all these groups that are speaking today and spoke yesterday for their work. I just want us to do better as a nation on this. I have to think that BLM, there are people there that this can't sit well, these helicopter roundups, what's happening to horses. We can do better as a nation, I think. You have all these groups that can work with the BLM.

You can work with the BLM. I urge you to just urge them to do what makes sense and what's fair and what's humane and work together collaboratively. You have all these groups that care and have expertise and why aren't we working together to solve this problem? We just can do better as a nation, and I urge you to urge the BLM to work with you and work with these groups and collaborate, and I thank you for the opportunity to speak and want to leave time for others. Thank you.

Alicia Windsong Diamond

These are comments given to me by hip number O187, a wild horse, which I obtained from the Colorado BLM. Imagine yourselves at a family picnic when a UFO descends among you and begins stealing your family members, killing those who resist right before your eyes, chasing away those who run and holding captive those who live. That is how it began. We run, but your helicopter swoops around to drive us out of the trees, to find us behind hills. I am a stallion, the herd sire. It is my job to protect my family. Run, run my family. We scatter.

This we do when a lion chases us. It confuses. We are running, racing a bright light, sharp noise from the droning shadow overhead. My beautiful mate is leading the mares. She's powerful and fast. She falls dead. I am powerful and fast. I'm dark brown. She is white and now red blood streaks her beautiful sides.

I run by her. I am enraged. I cannot help her. I run on trying to protect my family, my children. We run and run. Then we were driven into corrals, but the men wanted to conquer me. They tied me in ropes and I fought them. More ropes on my feet, face and neck until I could not move. Then they dragged me. They did not feel joy when they beat me and left me to bleed in the sun. That is the point. They did not feel. Only when they were more violent than the word violent could hold did they feel anything at all. That made them feel powerful. But this could not make me forget my nobility, nor did the years spent alone in a jail cell nor when they took me out to rope me and try again to squelch my noble spirit. I will not forget my nobility now, nor will we, not in your helicopter chases your jail sorrows or slaughterhouses. Why are you capturing, crippling, killing and confining us? You cannot gain strength and power by beating or eating us.

And the wealth you gain is nothing without peace. What is it in humans that resists nobility, courage and honor? It is because you have lost your own integrity. We stand above all on integrity, on compromising integrity and love. Thank you.

Sherman Swanson

Thank you. While failure to manage condemns us to poverty, achieving and maintaining appropriate management level provides a win for all. Thriving natural ecological balance achieves land health. Horses are healthier on range, in off range pastures with single-sex herds or adopted. Less gathering is needed after AML. Fertility control becomes effective. Healthy bunch grasses and winter fat resist cheat grass and its boom-bust fire cycle. Riparian areas keep water on the land longer. People enjoy healthy wild horses, wildlife and public lands. Healthy plants grazed properly grow leaves and roots.

Taxpayers save money. All excess horses become adoptable. Ecosystem services increase. Everyone should support a win-win-win. So to answer yesterday's question, after AML stay at AML. We must learn from this and never repeat a 332% increase in on-range horses in 13 years. We can and must get to AML in six years, not 10 by following the 2020 plan of gathering 20,000 horses per year. Repeated die-offs like 2023 are not the path forward. If off-range horses prevent this, consider how many of them are beyond life expectancy.

It should not take horse lovers much adoption incentive if euthanasia is necessary for young heartbeats on public land and apply timely fertility control to all herds at or near AML. Thank you for your service to this nation helping us finally achieve the sustainability of appropriate management levels.

Peggy Coleman Taylor

Hello, I'm Peggy Coleman Taylor. An indigenous federally protected wildlife species that have survived for thousands of years are almost gone from the American landscape forever. The cattle and sheep ranchers as well as oil and gas conglomerates have stolen our land and our magnificent heritage. Wild horses of America end up in the most horrific illegal fate of slaughter across our borders from failed adoptions.

Wild horses are down to a sterilized pittance and the BLM and the genocide agents seem accepting of a non-scientific propaganda narrative AML. There are zero falls, zero family, zero procreation. Zero vitality, zero genetic viability. Please understand zero equals the American wild horses and burros ultimate extinction. I listened to all and propose a bold idea because the present one obviously isn't protecting the wild horses. Please consider recommending a pilot Program for rewilding for the wild horses to truly regain their freedom, families to thrive and live wild to naturally balance nature as herbivores by God's design in reducing catastrophic wildfires, a win-win for all.

Eliminate commercial conflicts, land grab, save wild horses from extinction, reduce wildfires and toxic smoke. This is not hypothetical, whereas the wild horse fire brigade has demonstrated for years, relocate excess wild horses to vacant wild lands freeing up 15% prime grazing for cattle and sheep, millions are spent on deadly wildfires with little effort on prevention. Wild horse fire brigade grazing Program helped stop Cal Fire.

Mike Harris, an environmental conservation wildlife attorney states the humane transfer of excess animals benefit local county and state agencies could serve as a legal path for a wild horse rewilding pilot Program that would demonstrate that wild horses can be managed in an ethical manner in appropriate wilderness areas removed from areas of economic conflicts as wild and free and benefit the surrounding environment and taxpayers. Stop making decisions from the old paragon, which should not serve our heritage icons of the West. Did you know that it took 600,000 horses to move a 10 million cattle drive to Texas alone?

Ann Reilly

Good morning. My name is Dr. Ann Reilly. First, I want to give you all my sympathy to Fred. He sounded like a very wonderful member of your organization. I am the National Director of Equine Welfare for the US Horse Welfare and Rescue 501c3, and its national coalition. We support all of the public statements made yesterday by the American Wild Horse Conservation and most others, and the woman who just spoke as a horse, and the woman who just spoke before me suggesting a radical overhaul is needed to protect the wild horses and burros.

I have personal evidence that wild horses are in kill pens and going to slaughter. Last year, some friends and I purchased 19 BLM papered horses from the Stroud kill pen in Oklahoma and rewilded them. It cost us a fortune and several months. The radical overhaul needed to protect the wild horses and burros supported by tax paying Americans begins with returning the equines back to sustainable living as nature intended on the public lands.

We deeply regret that the original intent of the Wild Free Roaming Horses and Burros Act is undermined. Livestock companies leverage their pack influence of misled members of Congress by falsely claiming the wild horses and burros

have overpopulated and damaged wetlands. In reality, it is grazing cattle with their root consuming habits that have caused significant harm to these lands.

It is evident to the public that livestock owners and contractors are making millions of dollars off the gathering of wild horses on the public lands to the detriment of the wild horses, burros and taxpayers. Returning horses and burros to their natural habitats would address several critical issues. It would eliminate the need for costly traumatic helicopter and motorized roundups that kill these animals. I also work with HISA and if a horse was ever chased 23 miles by a helicopter, it would be the end of horse racing.

Stephanie Boyles Griffin

Okay. So I'm Stephanie Boyles Griffin and I serve as a Senior Program Director for the Humane Society of the United States. I also serve as Chair of the Advisory Committee for the Botstiber Institute for Wildlife Fertility Control. I've been working with many of you on this issue since I joined HSUS in 2007. Back then, a GAO report warned the BLM and all of us that the Wild Horse and Burro Program was on an unsustainable path.

The on-range population was around 27,000. Yeah, I know only about 1200 from AML and the off-range population was 30,000. An adoption demand could not keep up with removal rates. The GAO warned that if the status quo remained and that off-range holding costs would overwhelm the Program. And fast-forward to 2024 and according to the data that BLM presented yesterday, there are about 74,000 animals on the range, probably more now and about 67,000 off range.

And so caring for these animals cost about \$108 million or 69% of the Program's expenditures. And as members of this Board and the public stated over and over yesterday, the BLM cannot keep doing the same thing over and over again and expect a different result. Yesterday Ms. McAlpine said "The BLM needs to stop the treadmill." And Dr. Perryman said, "This is a reproduction problem." And they're right.

The PopEquus model demonstration showed everyone what we already know. Reliance on removals alone or reliance on fertility control alone are not effective in sustainable approaches. The science-based approach is to strategically combine large scale gathers with targeted removals. And in Dr. Drotar's presentation yesterday, it was heartening to hear that despite their significant budgetary constraints, the Forest Service is prioritizing the incorporation of fertility control.

Dr. Perryman and Mr. Higbee were excited to hear that the BLM is working on a 10-year plan and anxious to hear more about it so that they can work with their constituents to support it. We are too, but it was extremely disappointing to hear the BLM's performance metrics are all still focused on removals and adoptions and not population growth suppression.

Karen Simas

Perfect. The only reason that we're able to be here at this meeting is due to the public outcry of the abuse of our iconic wild horses, which have withstood over the decades. The BLM was created by the cattle industry and with that, the public constantly fights this very entity. The public outcries that we need oversight and the BLM creates the Comprehensive animal Welfare Program hired by the BLM, which seems a conflict of interest.

The narrative that the BLM pushes on PBS channels and programs fear monger that the wild horses and burros are starving. But we all know that's not true. This past 2024 roundup season, I have talked to representatives in Wyoming about the North Lander Roundup and he stated he would rather just build a slaughter facility than deal with these pests.

Approximately 60,000 wild horses roam our public lands, yet 1.5 million cattle are on the same land. Yet the BLM states the land is destroyed by the wild horses and burros. Close to 70,000 are in jail. While the money the wild horse and burro industry rang in - \$154.8 million - last year on the roundups and in holding penned fees.

Remember this is US tax dollars that are going to the very powerful and wealthy folks like Jarrison Flatt. The cost of the ranchers that the BLM protects and helps fund pay a measly \$1.35 animal unit month. Who's winning this game? It's pretty obvious.

If we are in business to eradicate the wild horses and burros, just be honest. We are all exhausted fighting for the right thing. If eradication is the plan, Project 2025 is reality and all the holding pens will be cleared out with slaughter. We as advocates, well myself, do not make any money off trying to save these animals. These beautiful, iconic symbols of freedom our country was built on. You can do better. Stop hiring folks that are connected to the cattle industry. Put scientists in positions and let's do the right thing. Let's work together and maximize wild horse efforts. Thank you.

Ji Montgomery

I was calling to say that I oppose the roundups of wild horses and I think that you guys should remove the cattle and other animals rather than removing the wild horses and the roundups need to be stopped immediately. And that's pretty much it. That's it.

[20-minute break]

Burro Ecology- Increasing our Understanding of Disease and Migratory Patterns of Donkeys in Death Valley

Dr. Amy McLean, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Teaching Equine Science, UC Davis

Ms. Carlisle: Hi everybody. Welcome back. Sorry, our break went a little long. We're transitioning between presentations. I have the great pleasure of introducing a good friend and colleague, I'm happy to say and lucky to say, Dr. Amy McLean from UC Davis. Amy, if you'll do a little bit more of an introduction of your title and place at Davis. But my involvement with Amy is her vast knowledge and expertise about mules and donkeys, and she is one of the people I have watched working with these animals that is sort of the light bulb moment for me with little knowledge of donkeys and burros, that they are not just different horses.

It is with great pleasure that I introduced Dr. McLean to talk about some of the, I would say, missing information that the Board doesn't yet have about mules and donkeys, well donkeys in particular, that we try to learn more about, but they always sort of come secondarily to the horse issue. We are trying hard to make sure that we equalize that, and I am pleased that Dr. McLean will help us in that process. Thank you for being here.

Dr. McLean: Thank you for the introduction, Celeste. And thanks to everybody for inviting me. It's a real honor to get to speak to this group, and I know there's a lot of unique backgrounds that are here today representing different aspects of wild horses and donkeys or burros. So just to start out, just kind of a play on words, I thought it'd be fun to think about this, especially when we're talking about the differences and the similarities in donkeys and horses because I think oftentimes donkeys are under that category of horses or they're thought of as not an equine at all. Are they donkeys? Are they burros? What are they? Is it tomato? Is it tomato? So just starting there, we'll look at a few of the research projects that I've been involved in that do involve free roaming wild feral, whatever title you'd like to use, and I know that can be a sensitive subject with a group of donkeys here in California.

Okay. I think it's important when we are looking at this population of equids, and again, we define what an equine is, it's donkeys, mules, horses, ponies, zebras in their hybrid offspring. We think about where do donkeys come from, where did they evolve from, how do they survive? And then you'd use that in comparison to their horse cousin. It's also I think, important considering the emerging uses of donkeys.

We should spend just a little bit of time looking at that because that affects our donkey populations on a global basis. Doesn't matter if they're in the wild or they're in a domestic situation. I want to spend just a little bit of time talking about donkey behavior and then also some of the challenges. And like I said, just touch briefly on some of the research we've

been involved in. At the end I will share some information that is not published, so we're not going to spend a lot of time on that until it's published in respect to one of my colleagues here, Dr. Sarah King, so going forward.

Again, when we think about donkeys and burros and I know everybody here is very close to this subject to some matter, but we think about where they came from, how they got to the west. We know they likely came with settlers, they were part of the gold rush, but they've been very important in terms of just developing people and humanity, and I don't think that should be forgotten or overlooked.

They've been really important also in crossing or accessing ecosystems that are very uninviting to people such as Australia or even Death Valley, where the only animals that really could cross that very harsh and challenging terrain was actually mules that were used for the 20 Mule Borax team. And of course, a mule is half a donkey, half a horse. Some of the concerns of course we have for donkeys and especially in that area specifically that I have some experience working in, in Death Valley is the impact on the ecosystem of the burros competing with other animals in that area, but they've been there for such a long time.

I think it's also important to consider how they have integrated into the mega-fauna and they've become a part of that ecosystem. My involvement in Death Valley has been, like I said, with one of my colleagues here, and then also working with an NGO, a non-governmental organization that had the agreement to remove a lot of the donkeys. We were looking at different ways as donkeys were removed and then looking at their overall well-being and health status.

But again, just going back to this idea of donkeys are burros, where they came from, how they've been a part of civilization and humanity. They were first hunted for food just like horses were. They were domesticated before the horse thousands of years ago. This might be a history that everybody already knows. If not, then we'll sit back for a little bit of a brief history lesson this morning, but they were domesticated before horses because of their natural behavior and that behavior is to freeze versus flee like a horse does.

And that really comes into play when we do look at their natural behavior and then the environment, a desert-like ecosystem, where they live and where they evolve from. We think in Mesopotamia. So around Egypt is where they were likely domesticated because they were easier to capture than the horses were that would flee and run away because we're dealing with people on foot with this capture process.

When they were captured and started the process of being domesticated, they were very important for people to be able to pack their goods on their back and then actually travel further distances. They were definitely responsible for dispersing culture and different groups of people interacting with other groups because now they could actually travel further thanks to the help of the donkey packing all of their belongings on them.

We look at the world population of equine. We think there's about 100 million equids in the world found on every continent with the exception of Antarctica. And about half of that population we assume are donkeys and then a small part of that are actually they're hybrid offspring, the mules and the hinnies. Some of the population is now under new stresses because of the use of these animals, and we're starting to see a decline actually in donkey numbers on a global basis because of the pressure of the donkey skin trade industry. Donkeys for thousands of years have been used in this capacity, but it's a new pressure because of the demand, and we'll talk about that just a little bit later on. Then there's also populations that are under the pressure because there's loss of habitat, they're in various areas, specifically in East Africa, and then also of course in the Middle East where there are war-stricken zones so their access to resources is limited.

It's just a chart again, looking at that global population. And most of the places where we do find donkeys today are in developing countries or countries where it might be less likely to have access to mechanization such as tractors and trucks and things like that. They still rely on the donkey and their hybrid offspring as truly beasts of burden. So that population that we're seeing, the half of the equine population, they're still found in areas where they're used for work. They're also really important in terms of gender equity. Women are allowed to work donkeys in areas where they cannot access oxen or maybe utilize mules or horses. Donkeys are very important in that aspect as well.

I saw some new data from BLM. Congratulations on these very impressive charts and information, but wow, it took a while to go through it. I was just trying to find what was the donkey population and compared it to the horses. From my understanding of this chart that came out, I think it was in 2023, there's been a decline as well in the feral or free roaming donkey population here in the US with most of the donkeys being found from this information that I reviewed, and again, this is probably news that you're aware of, but in California, Nevada, and then Arizona is where most of our populations are, which makes sense when you think about where they evolve from in terms of a desert. But I just want to spend a little bit of time looking at some new uses of donkeys that are new old uses that are coming back.

And it might be a way for the donkey population to actually increase because they're now being quite useful in a production setting from dairy and meat production. In Eastern Europe it's very common to find donkey dairies and the milk is the closest thing to humans' milk. There's a huge interest in using this for infants that are transitioning from breast milk to then a formula.

They're allergic to cow's milk protein because of the protein, the sizes and how that's actually digested in an infant's not so well-developed digestive system. But donkey milk has been used in replace of that. It's created a new but old interest. And I say old interest because Cleopatra was actually noted for taking a daily bath in donkey's milk because there's also anti-aging properties to the milk used and made for cosmetics as well. The next slide, which I did not get my video loaded, but I wanted to show you what a dairy donkey looks like.

Imagine donkeys right here, we're going to use our minds, walking into a parlor and being milked just like cattle, but there's only two teats, so they're using a goat milking machine for those donkeys. And what I wanted to share with you was I just recently returned from Argentina and in Northern Argentina there's a large population of wild feral free roaming donkeys, and they've actually gone into that population. They gather them on an annual basis and that is the source of their dairy donkeys. And then they go through an intensive handling program. Some of them never get very gentle, other ones, they come right around, but that is the source of their dairy donkeys in Argentina. It's a thriving and growing industry, and it's part of some of the universities in the Cordoba area. It's a new purpose for their wild donkeys. I thought it was fantastic, and there's a big demand for the donkey milk, so another use that's growing.

There's a lot of interest, but we can go on. The interest that's also growing, and I mentioned this earlier and if you are staying up to date with emerging issues of any type of animals, you've probably seen this come across the headlines, but it's using donkeys for skin production. Like I said, this is an age-old use of donkeys that dates back 2- to 3000 years to the Shandong Dynasty in China. The idea is that the skin has traditional Chinese medicinal properties. It improves anemia, libido. There's even stories where it helped empresses prevent miscarriages. The middle class is growing throughout China and Yizhou where the skin product was once a very expensive product to have, and with the growth of the middle class and a change in the economies, they would like to also have access to what only maybe the rich or an emperor dynasty had at one point.

This has placed a huge pressure on the donkey and just donkey population on a global basis. Any wild or feral donkey that might go through different hands and end up in an auction, this is a likely fate of that animal. There are actual farms that are also raising donkeys for this purpose. I've visited those in China.

We've looked at different welfare, but again, it's an emerging use of donkeys. It's been around for thousands of years, but it's become more popular. The third-biggest user of this product is actually here in the US. I think that's somewhat interesting as well. And then again, of course we have the traditional uses of donkeys working. These are just found around the world. We have a donkey plowing potato fields in Portugal, another one where donkeys are working cattle in Veracruz, Mexico and then a donkey in West Africa pulling goods to the market.

But another interest in donkeys here in the US, and I think this is really a great interest, is using them as companion and show and recreational animals. And this interest has actually driven the interest in research and also veterinary medicine to learn more about donkeys and how donkeys are different compared to horses from everything like their body temperature is different than a horse to their nutritional needs and other differences such as anesthesia and sedation is somewhat different in a donkey and how they clear medicine. And again, all those differences, which I find all these

fascinating when you stop and think about it, they go back to where the donkey evolved from. And we know that they absolutely thrive in areas like Death Valley because they are desert creatures.

Just a few longear lingo to just familiarize yourself. Donkey, again, the term “burro” is a Spanish word for donkey. If you were to look at their genes or their body temperature or physiology, it's going to be the same animal as a donkey. It's just a different term. And I understand the BLM or the Wild Burro and Horse Act, it referred back to burros, not donkeys. It's likely why that language is used so commonly, but it's the same animal, just different way to describe them.

Female donkey we refer to as a jenny or a jennet. Either one is correct. If you're in Europe, you might hear mare. So again, it depends on geographically where you're located. The male donkey is a jack, or again, if you're in Europe, or you're in China, they might say stallion. They're referring to again a male intact jack. When the donkey is castrated, which again from a veterinary medicine side, there's a lot of risks that go along with that, but it might be referred to as a gelding or a cut jack. Doesn't mean the jack has an open bleeding wound or lesion. It means that he has been castrated.

I just thought it might be fun to look at from a genetic standpoint, the chromosome differences in donkeys and horses. Donkeys have 31 chromosomes, horses have 32 pairs. When we cross the two to make a hybrid species such as a mule or a hinny, which is a reciprocal cross where you take a female donkey and you breed it to a stallion, all of those chromosomes don't talk to one another. You get an animal with less chromosomes, less genetic information. That likely leads to the reason why mules and hinnies are usually sterile. Not always, but usually, but just thought it'd be fun to look at. They're even different on a chromosomal level. I think that's important that we learn these differences.

This might come through a little bit hard to read, but I get requests a lot of times for what are the differences in donkeys compared to horses. This is just a list of a lot of the anatomical differences. Everything from having long ears to help dissipate heat to the size of their nostril is smaller. If you pass a nasal gastric tube, if you're having to do any type of work with their gastrointestinal tract, that is also a smaller diameter.

The angle of their throat is different, and the angle of the throat being at a different angle is why donkeys bray, and they don't whinny or neigh. Again, the back of the donkey is different. The hoof is different so they don't sink in the sand compared to a big flat hoof of a horse that's more in grasslands. The angle of their pelvis is more upright and then their tail is even uniquely different. It's more like an elephant's switch than it is a big, long flowing beautiful tail like a horse.

But those differences, again, go back to where the donkey actually evolved from and its ability to survive in a very hot and dry arid climate. When we're looking at trying to assess the nutritional history of a donkey and looking at body condition scoring systems, we can use the one to nine scale, but I find it easier to use the one to five scale, which is becoming more commonly used I think throughout the US, but especially in Europe because I think it's easier to teach people your horse, your donkey is either fat or it's skinny.

And if you've worked much with donkeys, that's probably what you see unless you actually see them in a free roaming situation, they're absolutely perfect. But again, you're like, what are they eating? But again, that's how they should look. But when we adopt them out or we bring them home, we give them all the green grass and treats they can have, and then they become a five and they become very obese. But again, this is a scale that I prefer to use because I think it's easier to use as a teaching tool for people.

The other thing I think is worth mentioning, and I think it's really fascinating, there's donkey breeds just like there's breeds of horses, and I think this is oftentimes overlooked. There's 189 breeds of donkeys that we know. So it doesn't matter where in the world you travel, if it's China, Argentina, Mexico, there's a breed of donkey you can find in that country and maybe even multiple breeds of donkeys. We'll talk just briefly about that. There's still three types of actual wild asses, and again, most of those are in danger just because of lack of resources, and the areas they live in. There's lots of war activity and things like that. We've already talked about the term burro, so we'll just move forward from there.

Again, we've talked a little bit about maybe how donkeys came back to North America on ships and things like that. But what I think from a historical standpoint is very interesting is that the first president of the US, and again, we're going back to our history lesson here. George Washington was actually given donkeys from Spain and Malta. It was illegal to sell donkeys at that time. So that's why he was actually gifted these donkeys with one of them being called Royal Gift. He was an Andalusian donkey from the Andalusia region of Spain, and he actually did not like mares.

It was very interesting. He was given these donkeys from the king of Spain to help make mules to help build the country and expand the population, the civilization. Again, here we are depending on donkeys and mules and horses to move westward, but we'll talk a little bit about behavior later on. But not all donkeys like horses, a lot of times donkeys only like donkeys.

We'll go forward. Again, just looking at domestication. And they've had such an important impact on civilization and people, so we won't spend a lot of time talking about that. But a lot of the donkeys here in the US, and I've worked a little bit with some of the populations in the Caribbean specifically, Bonaire will link back to a wild donkey that is now extinct, the Nubian wild ass. And a lot of those donkeys likely link back to the Nubian because they were found in West Africa. When they were shipping people from West Africa, not only did they send slaves, but they sent the slaves with donkeys. And so that was likely a lot of the donkeys we see now in the Caribbeans, Venezuela, Northeastern of Brazil do date back. And the genetics are linked back to Nubian donkeys.

And we did a little bit of research with Texas A&M and Dr. Gus Cothran years ago, finding that relevance, which was kind of interesting. The Somalian donkey is found in Somalia, in Trea, so it's more in the Eastern part of Africa. Less likely a lot of our donkeys here in the US actually have genetics that link back to Somalian, but there are still some populations of Somalian wild ass. And then we can also find those in the zoo.

Moving to Asia, we can still find a wild ass form, the Kiang or the Onager. There's some interesting debate if they're the same animal, but because of where they're living, they have some different physical features in terms of height and color. But to our knowledge, neither one of those have been domesticated and they're free roaming and wild in the Northeastern part of India, Tibet and in that area. Just an example of what the Onager looks like, it blends very well back into a desert-like area. There are actual pictures in tombs in Egypt where there are Onagers that were likely domesticated or maybe captured that were used for pulling chariots. So that's the only form of domestication or maybe capturing Onagers that we have seen.

And then the Kiang, like I said, are sometimes referred to as a Tibetan wild ass is a much taller form of an ass, so can reach up to 15 hands. There's four inches in a hand. There's more white on the underside of the body, and also the ears are smaller, which would make sense when you think about the extreme temperature variations in Tibet and Nepal where you have a lot of cold as well. The bigger ears would not be advantageous to this animal. And then the Somalian wild ass. I think one of the unique things about the Somalian wild ass, we do not see the dorsal stripe on the Somalian, and even the striping on the legs is not as prominent as what we've seen in pictures of the Nubian wild ass. So again, just a little bit of a different phenotypic appearance to this animal.

Again, probably what you're most familiar with is the burro and the ecosystem or the donkeys, and they just thrive in this area because this is where they evolve from. And when you take that into account, then it really makes sense why they physically look different than a horse that evolved from a grassy savanna area compared to a rugged dry desert area. The other thing I want to mention, and we'll talk just maybe a little bit about this if we have time, but since they evolved from an area where there's not a plethora of green grass in front of them, donkeys are truly browsers and not grazers.

When you think about how much land can support a donkey compared to a horse, you really have to think about what are they eating? Because donkeys don't eat everything in front of them. They actually think about what they're eating and they seek out different nutritional sources.

And that also relates back to, which I think is really interesting, how donkeys respond from a behavioral standpoint to different things. They conserve their energy and this ability to conserve their energy and also seek out different food sources that might be more herbaceous or leafier. There's a different thought process that goes on in their midbrain, and because of that, they're able to actually reason to a higher level.

No offense to our horses, I love horses too, but they're actually able to think to a higher level because they have to reason, am I going to eat this or am I going to walk a little bit further, spend a little more energy and look for a different plant source to consume? And then that relates to how we train donkeys, how we interact with donkeys, how they metabolize medicine. And again, they've done studies looking at the level of reasoning in donkeys, mules, and horses, donkeys were the slowest to perform the task.

They're always on donkey time, conserving that energy. But compared to the mules, they had the most correct answers. The mules were the quickest, had a lot of correct answers. The horses, sometimes they were right. A lot of times they were wrong, but the donkeys were the slowest. But I think that's really fascinating when you start to think about how it affects their midbrain and then the rest of their behavior. They're also able, as we know, to consume water and then actually recycle the water in their body. So that's why they can go for so long without water. They take bigger bites of food. There's just a lot of very interesting differences when you start to watch a donkey eat and drink water.

Getting into the feeding behavior, like I said, I think browser versus grazer is really important. And the fact that they do seek out different sources of forage based on maybe protein levels, carbohydrates, energy and things like that. Another big advantage, I'm not going to go through all these bullet points, but they will consume plants that have maybe a better taste where horses would overlook those plants. And that can be an advantageous aspect to donkey feeding behavior. It also can be very detrimental because oftentimes the plants they do seek out that have higher tannins or a bitter taste, that is a warning that that is a poisonous plant. So that's sometimes where the donkey is not so smart. And then that toxin will build up in their liver over time, and then it could be detrimental to their well-being. The other advantage sometimes to plants that have higher tannins, it could naturally serve as an antiparasitic, so there could be some properties and actually cleansing the gastrointestinal tract of worms or parasites that might be found there.

Just another thing that I'll mention about donkeys and their feeding behavior is the fact that they're very similar to small ruminants like sheep and goats and their ability to, when they are consuming a forage, that it can actually stay in their gastrointestinal tract twice as long as it stays in a horse's gastrointestinal tract. They have this same digestive efficiency or very similar digestive efficiency to small ruminants. So that's another great advantage to them. And again, that's why they can survive and live in places like Death Valley.

And we've already mentioned this a little bit, the grazing and browsing, but I hope the next time you interact with a donkey, you think about that and maybe even watch them eat. Because when they are consuming different plants, they're fantastic at using their lips, which are almost like a monkey's tail in terms of the agility of their lips. And they've even been referred to as prehensile lips, where they can search out certain grains or certain sources of plants. So that's another really interesting feeding behavior of donkeys.

In terms of communication, we already talked a little bit about why donkeys make a different sound than horses. They don't whinny and neigh, and that goes back to the angle of their larynx, and also the fact that their nasal area is a lot smaller in diameter compared to that of the horse. These are just a few of the sounds that have been heard from donkeys, grunts, growls, snorts, which is similar to horses, or whuffles, but the big one is the bray, and donkeys will talk to you.

Again, if you have experience being around that, you already know that, but they can alert you that there's a stranger on your property, or they can tell you they're hungry, or there's something to be alerted about, and I think that's really an interesting communication that donkeys display. From a social aspect, donkeys like having a friend. So we know the horses are gregarious, and they live in a herd environment, but donkeys tend to partner with another donkey, but that goes back to when a jenny has a foal, in a natural environment, that foal will likely stay with the jenny for a year, two years, and they will live in a small family unit. It's also very sad when a donkey loses its companion donkey because they truly mourn the death of that donkey, similar to what we see in elephants. For how long?

I'm not sure if anyone's documented or studied that, but if people are looking at obtaining a donkey, we always encourage them, get the donkey a friend, get two donkeys. Yes, you can put your donkey in with a horse, but the donkey is not a horse, and not all horses are appreciative of their cute, long-eared friend. So if there's a way to get two donkeys, I think that's always the best thing to do because they will bond. And then from, again, a free-roaming standpoint, or even in a small captive area, especially the male donkeys, they become very territorial, and you see that in where they defecate, where they urinate, and they will patrol that whole area. And that is where people have gotten the idea that they're great as guard animals to protect livestock, because they will protect that area from any invaders, and that could be people, a cat, maybe a coyote, but that's generally the behavior we see.

And she can correct me if I'm wrong, but I think Dr. King and some of her colleagues have done some really interesting social behavior work, and they've actually started to notice a difference of some of the free-roaming groups, where they're starting to form more harems. But again, I might be speaking out of term but look up some of her papers on that. The other thing I'll mention, and I failed to mention that the jacks can be very vicious when they're fighting, and it goes back to another interesting anatomical difference in donkeys. When they're fighting, they generally go for the jugular, just like the saying is. Because of that, if you're trying to access the jugular vein of a donkey, the muscle that covers and protects it, called the cutaneous colli muscle, is much thicker in a donkey.

And it's always fun to work with young veterinary students when they're trying to access the vein. "Oh, I've got it," and I'm thinking, "Yeah, I bet." They usually don't. And you also have to go in a more upright caudal placement of the needle. And again, that's an adaptive trait from fighting and evolving in a territorial-type social system.

Okay, some notes we see donkeys and we also see their hybrid offsprings enjoying is rolling behavior. Again, if you're more used to horse behavior and you see your horse rolling, you're probably very concerned that the horse is actually expressing abdominal discomfort, known as colic, but this is very natural behavior for donkeys and mules. A lot of it's likely getting dust on their body to protect them from insects, but it's also like a free chiropractic adjustment. But this is a behavior you will see that's displayed more frequently in donkeys and mules, compared to horses. Okay, so a little bit about research.

I was asked to talk some about that. My first experience in Death Valley was working with a group of donkeys that had been captured and were going to go to long-term holding facility in Texas, like I said, with a nonprofit, that was commissioned to gather those donkeys in that area. And we were interested in looking at the donkeys and the level of disease the donkeys were carrying off the range, and we were also most interested in looking at trying to evaluate a way to monitor if the donkey was sick or not sick before it was actually shipped to the location in Texas or their other holding facility in Arizona. There was a lot of interest at that time in a new stable-side kit called, I'm not going to say the name of the kit, but it was involved with looking at a protein that would increase drastically if the animal had an infection or inflammation in its system called Serum amyloid A.

So, again, being a donkey person, they'd proven it worked quite well in horses. The other marker that you would typically look at is fibrinogen, but that would take a longer period of time for fibrinogen to actually increase. If you're shipping donkeys the next day, you're not going to know until maybe a few days later that there's an infection or there's inflammation. This was a great idea if it would work. Again, donkeys are not horses.

I was curious, "Will it work? Will it not work?" So would this group of donkeys and a great team from UC Davis, we went out and we did nasal swabs for these donkeys. And, of course, we know that there's big population in Death Valley.

The donkeys thrive there, but there's a lot of interest to control that population. It was my understanding at the time, was also to get rid of all the donkeys in that area to remove them, so we wanted to make sure we were doing this the best way possible. Of course, I think everyone probably in this crowd knows where Death Valley is, and I hope you've had the opportunity to go there. It's absolutely stunning, amazing. Maybe you'll see a donkey, maybe not.

But this is the area where we were working in the Furnace Creek area, and we had the donkey's house close to the airport. This is a video. As you can see, we're bringing in all these donkeys. They've gathered all these donkeys off various places of the park there in Death Valley, and then we're putting them all together. It's kind of like kids going to kindergarten.

It's a great way to share your cooties or your germs, right? But what cooties or germs did they actually have? We didn't know that. This is the pen full of jennies and their babies. Absolutely adorable.

I really wanted to take a few home with us. The students said I couldn't do that in the university van. It's probably a good thing they told me no. And then we had all the jacks also in a pen. But again, we're co-mingling or mixing different populations of donkeys together, and we were very curious, "Well, what are these different populations carrying?"

And now, they're all one subpopulation from the park. So that was just kind of how they were housed. From there, we had about 100 head of donkeys before they were about to ship out.

But again, we were interested in when these donkeys were going to their new locations, where they were going to interact with more donkeys. The NGO has about 3,000 donkeys under their care. "Should we quarantine them? For how long should we quarantine them? Should certain donkeys be quarantined longer? Are they going to need medical care and things like that?"

And from what I could read, we really knew very little about the health of feral, or wild, free-roaming donkey/burro populations before they're captured. "Are they sick? Are they carrying disease? How can we actually evaluate that?" Thinking back to these donkeys and the fact that they're very stoic, they don't express when they have pain or disease until they're pretty much dead, and that's why I have this picture right here.

We've got one donkey that's lying down. So, the rest of the donkeys are up. They're about to go through the chute system, so we can take our samples, we can pull for a Coggins test, and things like that, but we've got one donkey lying down. That is not normal donkey behavior. So why is that one donkey lying down?

And is this a way that we can actually monitor their health by taking one nasal swab, and learning more about what their diagnostics and what's going on? Okay. So, like I said, we used a stable-side kit that would give us immediate answers for this Serum amyloid A, and that was done with just simply a drop of blood, and had students running this, so even the students who didn't have a lot of experience should be able to run this kit for you.

And, again, it would tell us if there was inflammation or infection, which both, again, would relate back to a level of disease. And then, as to try to correlate that with disease, probably the most dangerous thing we did, and somehow I got the job of doing that, but was going to the front of the donkey and doing a nasal swab to then go back to the lab and run PCR, way to look at the DNA of various bacteria and viruses that may be very common in some of our horse populations, such as equine influenza, different strains of rhinopneumonitis, or equine herpesvirus. We also looked at asinine herpesvirus, and I will share a little more about the results of this in just a few minutes.

But again, our objective was to try to evaluate the health status of the donkeys. "Is there a way to better monitor this before their shipped? And then when they arrive to their location, do we need to start medical treatment? What is the disease they have?" and then, if there was any way to correlate that to any of the behavior and body condition as well. So it's just a fun schematics that we did.

But what we found, when we did the nasal swabs at the foals, actually had the highest level of pathogens for asinine herpesvirus 2 and 5. We have vaccines for the equine herpesvirus 1 and 4, but currently, there are no available vaccines for the asinine strains of this. Some of the younger donkeys also tested positive for equine influenza. Donkeys are very susceptible to equine influenza. And again, it is termed equine because all equine can get it zoonotic, so the donkey can share it with the horse, the horse can share it with the donkey. But overall, the level of disease and this herd of donkeys was extremely low.

We also looked at equine strep, and then we looked at zoo, and there was a higher population of a zoo bacteria, but that could have easily come from the handling facilities. We don't know exactly where the donkeys came in contact with that bacteria, but there was a low prevalence of that. Now, the blood kit, the stable-side blood kit that we use is Serum amyloid A. It did work well, but what we found was that the inflammation response in donkeys, and then we later did some work at the American Fondouk in Morocco, Fez, Morocco, with donkeys, mules, and horses with known clinical conditions, but what we found with donkeys, as well as mules, and that was a later study, they have a lower inflammatory response compared to horses. So if you use what the label describes as an inflammatory response in the start treating, you may actually misdiagnose donkeys that have inflammation or maybe have an infection. So that was really important.

Again, donkeys and horses, we're not comparing apples to apples. So overall, a very healthy population of donkeys coming off the range. The Serum amyloid A kit will work, but you have to keep in mind donkey and mule values, and not horse values. So some newer research that we started doing. And then, as everybody knows, the world shut down because of COVID.

We started this, and then that happened, but we were interested in the migration patterns of donkeys in this area, but then also, in the neighboring area of Mojave, and also some of the different military area where there's high populations of feral donkeys. And this work was done with my colleague that's here now, Dr. Sarah King at Colorado State University, and Dr. Kate Schoenecker from USGLA, right? United States Geological Survey Center. Got to get the acronym down. They are really the radio collar experts.

If you have specifics on radio collar, please refer to them. My input on this was assisting, and also helping with the disease part of this, because we were also interested, "Are the donkeys going to travel as far, or not as far? If they have a disease, which diseases are we going to see in these different areas because now, we have new populations of donkeys that we're monitoring."

Oh, I forgot I had a video here. We had just released these donkeys after they were fitted with their collars, and to me, this was one of the most exciting things to see, because one, you don't usually see donkeys running because they conserve their energy, but it was like they were celebrating. They had their collars on, and they were also away from the humans that did all these strange things to them. But what was also interesting, after the group was released off the trailer, there was a donkey that came down from the hills to see them. It was like, "Hey, here I am."

We're on a military base. Very inviting when you arrive. These are some of the objects you may see, this was at Fort Irwin.

They've really liked the donkeys, but there's a lot of donkeys. And, again, donkeys like to reason because they're interested in what they're eating, and the donkeys interact with some of the bombing devices and testing devices, and it doesn't end so well for the donkeys. They're interested in trying to control the population, and also safely remove their donkey friends, so they're not exploring some of these devices. So, again, we were interested in looking at burro ecology, where the donkeys were actually migrating to, when they were accessing water, were they going to the hills, or were they staying in flat land at different times of the year? This was a two-year project because the radio collars, we were hoping would stay on for two years.

We'll talk about how some of them did not stay on. And then also, did disease actually affect the migration patterns of the donkeys? We started out trying to radio-collar 100 donkeys or burros. We were only able to collar about 23 donkeys. And part of our population we wanted to collar were male donkeys.

There were some information on mares, a little bit of information maybe on female donkeys, jennies, but nothing on the actual jacks. And knowing, we go back to their social structure, and knowing they patrol an area, just like the one donkey that we saw, likely a jack because he interacted with the one jack that was released with the jenny and the foals, how much further, and where are the jacks actually going? Well, the jacks didn't want to be a part of this study. They had other things in mind. And we mentioned the fighting, and we mentioned fighting around the neck and the jugular veins.

The radio collars became new devices to pull off of one another. After collaring three males and the expensive collars not working, we did not continue down that road. We had 20 females that did wear their collars a little bit longer, we were able to gather data from, and like I said, this was done in the military land of Fort Irwin, which also backs up to NASA's land. We're as close to where those donkeys were released, and then Death Valley. The other complication, along with the jacks not wanting to participate, COVID really shut down things, made it harder to access the donkeys to get in on government land. We're government workers, to some degree.

So that threw another kind of hiccup in this project. We were looking at the hot dry and the cold season, and if there was a difference. We did gather some nasal swabs, and we ran PCR on those that were collared, so we were able to look at disease in relationship to migration. And then, from a statistical standpoint, we've looked at GML mix protocol, looking at where the donkeys were, their location, and then how that affected, again, the time of the year, the amount of rainfall, and where the donkeys actually went. So just a few more pictures of the donkeys and go forward.

So here are the donkeys in the holding area at Fort Irwin, waiting for their collars, and then those are two of the jacks that actually got their collars. The other thing that's interesting, when you look at the dentation or the dental cavity of donkeys, they do not age the same way that horses age. There's been a few studies out there, but a yearling donkey will not actually shed its teeth until it's about three years of age. So, again, with the jacks, we were working with the nonprofit. The person in charge of collecting the donkeys estimated their age, but I think they were actually younger than what he thought, because there was some growing that happened, which made the collars fit a little different after a period of time.

I think that is something to keep in mind, if you are working with donkeys, do not use the horse scale for aging their teeth. Donkeys and mules too generally grow for a longer period of time, compared to horses. So that was another kind of thing we ran into with our donkeys. And this is a video. This is Dr. Kate, fitting a radio collar with Dr. King's assistance.

Like I said, they're the experts in this. That's why I got them involved. The nonprofit reached out to me, and I said, "I know nothing about this," but we're just fitting. And the other thing you notice, so this is a wild donkey. It has a halter and a lead on it, amazing.

I mean, I'm not sure, but I'm assuming this is not practiced with the horses that come through the chute for their very first interaction with people, but what does a donkey do? It freezes, it's a good citizen, it allows us to fit its radio collar, but very calm. So again, conserving energy. The radio collars were programmed to fall off in two years, so that's why this was also a two-year project, and that would allow us also to measure the season twice, so hopefully the data would be more consistent. This is releasing the donkeys.

Like I said, this was really a cool moment to see the donkeys going back out into the wild, they were really excited about. The other thing the donkeys did, because they are creatures of habit, some of the donkeys that were radio-collared, because they were easier to capture, because they were closer to the barracks and where people lived, they kept coming back. They kept coming back to the people. These donkeys at Fort Irwin might not have gone out as far as some of our donkeys in Death Valley did.

And again, there's a celebration, but these donkeys are in perfect body condition. And when you look at that environment, we see rocks, sagebrush, which donkeys actually don't eat, more rocks, hills. It's like, "What are they surviving on?" But I would love for people that have donkeys in their backyard to take a mental image of this and think about this body weight for donkeys. And this is that same video you saw earlier, where they're being released as a really sandy area where they're at.

And, again, unusual because you don't see donkeys run. They don't run too far. But the other donkey that comes down from the hills is very interesting. He travels a long way to actually reach this population. But then eventually, they stop. They conserve their energy.

That's him in the back. He might've been excited to see friends too. That could have been part of this as well. He wanted to join the crew, and he wanted his own collar to wear.

That was actually a different video. It just shows how far this donkey traveled, and they can move faster than you expect. He traveled a pretty long ways to interact with this other group. And, again, that would've been great data to get, "When is he going to the hills?" And then, "When is he in this flat area?" But, again, the boys didn't want to participate, so he wouldn't have been a candidate.

And how do I know he was a male? Because he was by himself and he was very vocal. No offense to any of the males in the audience today. And again, this is not published research, so we're not going to spend much time on it.

We're in the works of doing that. But just kind of what I want to recap here is we did see a difference in movement in the dry and the wet season. And again, this information will come soon when we get it published, but I think it's some exciting things that we have seen in terms of the difference of the time of year, if there's rainfall, if there's not, in terms of where the donkeys are traveling. And, again, another chart, again, it's not published, so I don't want to go into much detail, but we did see a difference in where they were traveling, what they were eating, and the amount of precipitation. And then, in terms of disease, we did detect a couple of different diseases, equine strep, again, the asinine herpesvirus, and then we could see a difference in seasons, but again, I'm not going to go into this since it's not published yet, but this will come soon.

We're working on it now. And again, that's the area where we were working, so we're in Fort Irwin, and then also Death Valley. Both of those areas have a lot of donkeys and made for a great area to test, where all they were actually traveling, because there's very little information on that. So that's coming, right, Sarah? Okay.

Again, I'm just not going to go into this, because like I said, it's not published out of respect to my colleagues and I, but these are some of the viruses that we saw again, asinine herpesvirus 5, we can go on, strep, and I think this was strep zoo. And again, that makes a difference just because of the clinical signs that we would see, and then how we would go about possibly treating it. And again, we did see some differences in movement in the wet versus dry season, but I'll save the conclusion until we actually publish our paper, but no surprise there, that we're going to see some difference in movement, depending on if it's raining outside or if it's not. And the same with elevation and how far the donkeys were traveling to water.

Again, just some of the parameters that we were interested in measuring. "Are they going up in the mountains when it's really hot? If there's access to water, are they coming back down to the low areas?" But again, this information will be out soon. And the same with how far they were actually traveling for water. So really exciting research.

I wish we could get the rest of our collars out. That may not happen. They'll have to be a different study. But thank y'all so much for your time and this opportunity. I'm always available to try to answer any donkey burro, tomato, tomato questions that you may have.

Discussion

Ms. Carlisle: Really fantastic. Thank you. Dr. McLean. We're running up against some time, but if we could maybe have just a couple minutes of any Board questions, comments. Well, there's a few. Dr. Perryman, we'll start with you.

Mr. Kuechle: Yeah, quick before you go, Barry.

Dr. Perryman, Ph.D.: Yeah.

Mr. Kuechle: Just so you know, the Board, the session 11 is not happening.

Ms. Carlisle: Oh.

Mr. Kuechle: Yeah. We have 15 minutes or so before our scheduled lunch.

Ms. Carlisle: Great. Great.

Dr. Perryman, Ph.D.: Cool. A comment and two technical questions. I've seen a lot of Khulans, Asiatic asses all over Central Asia. I've hardly ever seen them when they weren't running. I mean, they are.

They're gone and over the hill, and they're still going. It's interesting, different behavior there. But the technical questions is no *Pasteurella* or *Mannheimia*. We're supposed to use *Mannheimia* now. None of that showed up in any of your assessments.

Dr. McLean: No, that didn't show up.

Dr. Perryman, Ph.D.: Okay. And second, like goats, have a relatively giant liver with respect to their body size because they detox. They eat. If it's not poisonous or pokey, they won't eat it. That's a technical term I invented, pokey. Burros, is their liver relatively large with respect to their body size, as opposed to a horse? Do we even know that?

Dr. McLean: That's a great question. I'm not sure that we know that. Yeah, I don't know. I can follow up on that, but I'm not sure that anyone's actually looked at the size of the donkey compared to the size of a horse of similar size and done that comparative anatomy, but that's absolutely fascinating. I'd be interested to know more about.

Dr. Perryman, Ph.D.: Okay, thank you.

Ms. Carlisle: Dr. King, and then Commissioner French.

Mr. Kuechle: And Ms. McAlpine has a comment.

Dr. King, Ph.D.: Thank you. My question was about the donkey skin trade. Have you ever had any evidence that the U.S. donkeys are participating in that? And you said about that it was like a third consumer. Is it being sold here in products?

Dr. McLean: Great questions, Dr. King. Most of the U.S. donkeys, they go across the border, they go to Del Rio, and then they cross into the border. They're either processed in local, smaller facilities through Mexico, or there's a live transport through Tijuana, Mexico, where they send them on ships. Lots of donkeys from the U.S. are entering this trade, but they are from all over the world. The one thing I will say is it adds a value to donkeys where they didn't have a value before oftentimes, and especially some of the smaller, what we would refer to as a small standard donkey.

Although, I will say on a positive note, when Shrek came out, everybody wanted a small, gray donkey. And I heard driving here today, that Jelly Roll, one of the country artists, just got a donkey from his wife, so I'm sure everyone's going to now want a little, gray donkey. So that will help the value as well. And your second question about being sold here in the U.S., it's being sold on Amazon. The interesting thing about the ejiao, just kind of the product itself, there's very little product regulation.

There has been some testing of different products sold under the name of ejiao, being donkey skin, that's actually come back being pig or cattle skin, and that's been one of the big challenges that has placed the pressure on the global donkey population, is trying to meet this very high-growing demand, so, yes. There's been movement by some NGOs actually try to stop the trade of selling ejiao on Amazon. I don't believe that's happened yet.

Ms. Carlisle: Commissioner French, and then Ms. McAlpine.

Commissioner French: Just a quick question. I was just wondering, and I hadn't really noticed this in my field work, but with the behavioral differences and the habitat preferences that you see in the wild, did you see much of a susceptibility to predation?

Dr. McLean: That's a great question. My experience with donkeys in predation, worked with a student that was doing a PhD out of Arizona. And with his cameras, he's documented actually mountain lion predation in Death Valley, where they're consuming donkeys that are older in age, and that was where we actually got very interested in trying to age donkeys and the dentation based on his research that looked like they were actually going for older donkeys, and a lot of times male donkeys because they were by themselves, and some very interesting work. The other interesting work, the mountain lions in that area seemed to be extremely large, because they had shifted likely their protein source or food source to the donkeys versus some of the other wildlife they'd consumed in the past.

Commissioner French: Thank you.

Dr. McLean: You're welcome.

Ms. Carlisle: Ms. McAlpine.

Ms. McAlpine: I just wanted to say thank you, number one, for a fabulous presentation. Really well-thought-out, really educational. Thank you very much. And then, to kind of jump on what Jim just asked, I heard in the last couple of weeks, and I can't confirm it, but I did hear that there are photographs floating around portions of Mojave County, where they suspect wolf or wolf-cross predation on burros, the Cerbat foals and some livestock in the area. So, who knows? I can't obviously confirm any of that but came from a pretty reliable source.

Dr. McLean: Thank you for your compliment, and also the insight on other predation. I think anytime you have natural predators in an area, and you have a prey animal, such as a donkey, that can easily occur and definitely a way to possibly keep the population in check.

Ms. Carlisle: Anybody else? All right. Well again, many, many thanks. We are always grateful to people that make the journey here to make a presentation. We're not always in the easiest spot. Actually, Sacramento is pretty easy, but anyway, thank you very much.

And also a joy to hear about donkeys, we don't get to very often. All right, Bryant, any housekeeping before we head into a break?

Mr. Kuechle: Yeah, its lunchtime, so we got a little bit more time than we did yesterday, so hopefully that gives everyone more time to order and eat, but we plan to be back here at 1:00pm. At 1:00, we start the Advisory Board subcommittee workshop. I think the plan there is this will primarily be, not behind the scenes, in front of the scenes working, but on camera, but not necessarily presentation style. We'll be just working. See you at 1:00pm.

Break for Lunch (1-hour and 15 minutes)

Advisory Board Subcommittee Workshop

The Board broke into a group-work session to go over the draft recommendations before the presentation of the final recommendations.

Mr. Kuechle: Welcome back, everybody. We're going to enter into the work session of the Advisory Committee at this time. So for now, for the next hour or so, will just be a, not a presentation of sorts, but rather, the Committee working on their recommendations, so bear with us. The audio may be a little conversational, so to speak, but then ultimately, we'll come back into a presentation mode to present the final recommendations that are developed here to the BLM and the Forest Service. So turning it back over to Chair Celeste Carlisle.

Ms. Carlisle: Thanks, Bryant, and thanks everybody that may be watching. We do hear the public comments loud and clear. We do consider a lot of them and sometimes it takes a few meetings to integrate them into the process, or sometimes some things are relevant to time and place or to order of operation. And sometimes they're not relevant, but they do help us to consider how we think about things and how we're thoughtful about welfare and intent and making certain that the Board is tied into public sentiment, but also utilizes the different areas of expertise that this Board brings to this process. You're not going to hear everything discussed today, but we certainly hear that one of, if not the most talked about and potential management technique that ties everybody together is fertility control.

So we have taken that into consideration for this meeting. It's sort of our emphasis, as a friend of mine says, our emphasis, and we're going to talk through some recommendations. We're all tasked with developing a draft so that we can sit here with a starting point. So we're going to pull those up, and this is the painful part if you're watching, and we're going to go through them step by step and see what we think together as a group and deliberate about anything that might need to be changed. And then after that process, when we feel like we're relatively final, the subcommittees will engage in some background discussion about how and why we're approaching these particular recommendations. So that's the process and, again, apologies for how painful it is to watch, but we'll go ahead and get started with recommendation number one. Is there a way to have it on this screen in front of us here?

Ms. McAlpine: You want me to just read it to you? Does it make it easier?

Ms. Carlisle: Here we are. We can see it now.

Ms. McAlpine: Okay.

Ms. Carlisle: Thank you, Susan. Who was behind the major drafting of this one? You all? Okay. If you all want to read through this one, one of you.

Dr. Iacona, Ph.D.: Okay.

Ms. Carlisle: Go ahead, Gwen.

Dr. Iacona, Ph.D.: Obviously, we need to start it in a more grammatically-correct way, but the recommendation is, "That the BLM create a detailed five-year plan describing how they will incrementally and measurably reduce population growth in order to ultimately achieve range-wide AML. The plan should prioritize application of fertility control, administered remotely and/or in concert with gather-removals."

Ms. Carlisle: Beyond grammar, any thoughts about this one?

Ms. McAlpine: I have a couple of thoughts. "The plan in 2025," rather than leaving it open so that in 2030, they get a five-year plan. We need a date certain, and I would add, "The plan should prioritize application of fertility control in both sexes."

Ms. Carlisle: Do you all want to talk about why that's removed? We had initially talked about some of that and we think that the goal right now is fertility control. We're not sure which is the best approach and in what ratios. That's contingent upon the agencies to figure out for each territory or herd management area.

Ms. McAlpine: But both sexes does not limit that. They can figure that out. But the discussions that we've been part of for the better part of a day and a half, they keep on leaning to, "The mares, the mares, the mares, the mares," and I, for one, would like to say stop with the one-sided approach in a very pleasant, nice way. And I think just adding of fertility control in both sexes reminds them that it's not only the mares who are part of the problem.

Dr. Lenz, DVM: Well, the problem you get into is you can castrate all the stallions and jacks till you're tired and the mares are still going to become pregnant. I mean, they're the key. At least one study I've read shows that 40% of the foals are sired by a stallion other than the herd sire. I agree when you castrate every stallion and every jack that we round up, but I don't know if we need to go into detail. I think they're already doing that. I mean, I don't care either way, using the broad term fertility control.

Ms. McAlpine: Okay. Wait, wait. Let me finish that. Then being sensitive to that comment, Tom, would it be less objectionable to say population-wide fertility control?

Dr. Lenz, DVM: Well, I was going to make the point that we want to incrementally measure, but reduce populations, not population growth. We want to reduce the population in order to achieve range-wide AML. So I guess that would fall in there.

Ms. McAlpine: Yeah. I agree with that too, yep. Population size. Yeah.

Dr. Iacona, Ph.D.: Maybe it should be population size and growth.

Ms. Carlisle: Yeah, because what we're also getting at here is, and we talked about this a little bit in our sub discussion, is that there need to be targets for reducing the population growth rate. If you have a population that's growing at 20% and you gather horses and you just apply some random number of treatments in one year and then never again, that's not really a fertility control plan. That's application of fertility control one time. So if you have a measurable objective that you are trying to meet, such as a population growth rate of 10% or 7%, that helps guide you towards closer achievement of AML or achievement of AML. How do you get there? How many applications are necessary per year and in the second year and in the third year? Or depending on whatever you're using, that's going to change.

We're asking for that level of attention so that wild horse specialists have in their hand what they need to do from year to year so that there's an expectation of the work that goes into that and the personnel that's necessary to achieve that, which is not easy and it is different. But that level of measuring an outcome you're trying to achieve so that you can target towards it, I think, can help to begin to guide the processes that are going to be necessary on an HMA by HMA basis to determine, "How are we going to achieve this?"

If we need to apply 20 applications of immuno-contraceptive in year one, how many do we need to apply in year two if some need to be boosted and some need to be added to that plan, just for example? Because for fertility control to work, it has to be applied correctly and that's different depending on the type of fertility control that is applied and the population and the growth rate and your staffing. You have to plan for all of that ahead of time to understand and then to implement a fertility control Program that would be successful. That is my understanding of where we are trying to get with this recommendation and I don't know if we're there or partly there.

Ms. McAlpine: Okay, how about this then? Based on what you were saying, Tom, "In 2025, BLM will create a detailed five-year plan describing how they will incrementally and measurably reduce population size and growth in order to ultimately achieve range-wide AML. The plan should prioritize the successful application of fertility control, administered remotely and/or in concert with gather-removals."

Ms. Carlisle: Anybody?

Dr. Lenz, DVM: I mean, if we really want to get down to the detail, I'll recommend you that they produce a herd management area plan for each specific HMA.

Ms. Carlisle: Well, my understanding in BLM ... I'm going to need you all to weigh in on this. My understanding of this is not totally complete. BLM was litigated for updated HMAPs. I don't know if system-wide or just in one place, that litigation found in favor of the plaintiff. And then I believe BLM is incrementally working its way through updating those HMAPs, but I could be wrong.

Dr. Lenz, DVM: Well, do we include that in this recommendation?

Ms. Carlisle: Chad?

Commissioner French: Madam Chair?

Ms. Carlisle: Yes. We're going to get some assistance and clarification.

Dr. Iacona, Ph.D.: Right

Ms. Carlisle: Things that are occurring.

Dr. Iacona, Ph.D.: Or we can ask for something that can be added to things that are occurring, but we don't want to ask for something that's replicating something that's occurring and is something different.

Ms. Carlisle: Right.

Dr. Lenz, DVM: Right.

Mr. Chad Hunter: The decision you're talking about is for Pancake and it was specifically for that decision, that HMA. However, we are recommending that as we do gather plans, where possible, we will do HMAPs included in that, but that basically comes down to, still, the individual offices and districts. We are stressing it more, and the newer ones that are coming out, most of them are leaning that way and starting to do that.

Ms. Carlisle: I mean, that's what I'm noticing in the information that comes out from the agencies is that there are a heck of a lot of HMAP scoping processes occurring right now.

Mr. Chad Hunter: Yes, and it just takes a little bit longer to do an HMAP with the gather plan, and so that's why it just takes longer to do it. So that's why individually, the offices, the field offices and districts get to make those decisions. But as headquarters in the Program, we are pushing to have those done with our updated gather plans.

Ms. Carlisle: Okay.

Ms. McAlpine: With all that said, what if we just added, "HMAP development is an essential tool to achieve population reduction/stabilization" to that number one? Does that make sense for what Tom was asking? And I see you walked away.

Ms. Pearson: Susan, I think that our goal in this is to try and keep this as minimal as possible and not get too much into the weeds. And I think that's the value of simplifying the recommendations and having them be more ... I'll turn it over to Barry. Barry can say it better than I can.

Ms. McAlpine: Okay. Well, before you do, let me jump right in. And I'm sorry I'm far away and have a lot of words to say this way. We've been trying to minimize what we say for four years and probably ten before that. I think it's time to start to say what we mean and be really specific about it within some limitations. Obviously, this morning was talking about stay in our path. Stay in our path, but don't leave any doors open either. Okay, Barry. I'm listening.

Dr. Perryman, Ph.D.: I think Commissioner Pearson said it better than I could. The more succinct that you can be for a recommendation, the more effective the recommendation is going to be. And you can preamble it all you want to. It's still going to boil down to, "What does this specific recommendation say?" So clean and lean, I think, is always appropriate, as clean and lean as we can get to it anyway.

Ms. Carlisle: The HMAPs are happening.

Dr. Perryman, Ph.D.: Anyway.

Ms. Carlisle: Anyway, yeah, and I think this lines up with that well. I think the timing is good, and so we're feeding into that process, I think, appropriately without needing to add the entire process into the recommendation. But I understand where you're coming from. It's like, "Take this opportunity and let's make sure that this planning process includes the planning for fertility control," beyond just saying, "And we will use fertility control," because the agencies are going to potentially need to understand and utilize the actual complexity behind building a fertility control Program to gain permissions for additional staffing and/or contracting and/or the grants Program that supports the notice of funding opportunities that then support partners. It is feeding into this push towards that direction. I think we're okay with it, without needing to add in the HMAP qualification. I know the agencies are not supposed to be weighing in on this process. Are we thinking about that in the right way in terms of if the BLM received this recommendation and Forest Service? Does it make sense as it stands with going into the processes you all have in place?

Ms. McAlpine: Are we going to remain with this the way it's printed, "That the BLM," or are we going to change it to say, "A date certain in 2025, BLM will create..."? And then there was population size and growth, or reduction?

Ms. Carlisle: No, I think those are good. I think that helps to clarify it.

Dr. Iacona, Ph.D.: Yes,

Ms. Carlisle: And at the beginning of all of these, Tracy, just throw in, "The Board recommends."

Ms. McAlpine: And then what was the ... It was population.

Ms. Carlisle: Population size and growth.

Dr. Perryman, Ph.D.: I think get the "will" out of there.

Ms. Pearson: And "shall."

Ms. Carlisle: What is it? "Shall"?

Commissioner French: I had a better suggestion as well.

Ms. McAlpine: "Shall" is a better word than "will," thank you.

Dr. Lenz, DVM: Yeah.

Commissioner French: We have no authority for that. But the other thing is I'm just wondering whether or not we need "measurably and ultimately" in that. I think it's a little bit wordy.

Ms. McAlpine: Yep, yep.

Commissioner French: Describing how we will "incrementally reduce population size and growth in order to achieve range-wide AML."

Dr. King Ph.D.: I think that we wanted the word measurable in there

Dr. Lenz, DVM: Yeah.

Dr. King Ph.D.: Just to really make it more sort of quantifiable, and also to give something that could be measured against kind of thing, at least to give sort of targets and goals.

Commissioner French: I get your point, but I'm just wondering whether or not we're already there. I mean, how would you suggest that they do something any differently than they're doing right now in order to create measurability? That's kind of what I was thinking.

Ms. McAlpine: And I kind of agree with, I can hear Jim, how they will increment it and ultimately reduce population size. They give us numbers every single year we get those charts.

Dr. Lenz, DVM: You could put, "Shall create a detailed, measurable five-year ..."

Ms. McAlpine: "Five-year plan," yep. And then change "measurably" in the second line to whatever Jim just said.

Dr. Lenz, DVM: Yeah. So, "Create a detailed, measurable five-year plan describing how they'll incrementally reduce population size and growth." Add "measurable," and then remove it in the second line. But I'd still argue that if you're reducing population growth, you're reducing growth. If you're population size, you're reducing growth, aren't you?

Ms. McAlpine: Yeah, he's right.

Ms. Carlisle: Not necessarily. If you're reducing population size, you could say, "Well, we gathered however many and we applied fertility control to however many." But if you apply fertility control to two and you gathered a heck of a lot, well, that's okay for that moment. But if you haven't also targeted some sort of reduction in the population growth rate, then next year, they're reproducing as always.

Dr. Lenz, DVM: I'd buy that. But if you have a smaller population, they're going to grow less.

Ms. Carlisle: Until they don't because it's ... The word? Exponential. Populations grow exponentially. So it's okay, it's okay, it's okay, and then suddenly you're like, "Oh my gosh. There's way more of them. What happened?"

Ms. McAlpine: Yeah, and I kind of agree with you, Celeste, on that one. But I see what Tom is saying.

Ms. Carlisle: Dr. Perryman's fingers are slowly moving to the microphone button.

Dr. Perryman, Ph.D.: I can assure you that the BLM or anybody else is not going to look at that and get their knickers in a knot. Don't put that in the minutes. It is already on there. Well, okay. I don't think that's a significant issue, us arguing growth and population size. The intent is there. So I wouldn't spend much more time on that. I would, however, suggest

the first, whatever that sentence fragment is there, "The Board recommends in 2025 that the BLM create," get that ultimatum-type language out of there.

Dr. Lenz, DVM: Okay.

Dr. Perryman, Ph.D.: I mean, Tom, if you don't have any issues with population size and growth, I think we could probably move forward past that, if that's okay with you.

Dr. Lenz, DVM: Well, it's fine.

Dr. Perryman, Ph.D.: Thank you.

Ms. Carlisle: Shall we move to two? I'm sure that one can simmer for a little bit. Hopefully, we're good. So, "The Board recommends in 2025, and going forward, even if removals are constrained by availability of off-range holding space, application of fertility control should be prioritized as a tool to stabilize population growth in every HMA."

This should include HMAs where AML has not been achieved and should be applied by gather, hold, release, and/or by remote darting." And this was a really interesting subcommittee conversation. Dr. King or Dr. Iacona, do you want to go into a little bit of that background?

Dr. Iacona, Ph.D.: This was responding to, well, I guess a lot of the public comments, but also the conversation that we were having yesterday around the data from this year's plans and going forward where there currently isn't off-range capacity to hold enough animals to even get the number of individuals on the range to the same size population as last year, right?

Even with all of the activities that are planned to happen, population growth is still increasing. And so the idea here is can some of the effort that otherwise would go into gathering horses and putting them in off-range holding. If there isn't enough off-range holding capacity, that effort needs to go into fertility control instead, even if it requires catching the horses and letting them go again. But letting them go again with fertility control is better than doing nothing.

Ms. McAlpine: We can't hear whoever's talking beside you.

Ms. Carlisle: No, nobody else is talking. I think this one is so good and necessary. It came from Tom, essentially, your first draft and just trying to really tighten up and clarify that there are different steps to achieving this that are going to be necessary. And the realization that there is a constraint to the gathers, which are where the bulk of the meaningful amounts of fertility control, when we think of it population-wide, could and would be applied, and that stops when there's no place to put the horses.

And in effect, we're losing the opportunity to. It's the scaling up of fertility control and scaling down of gather-removals. One isn't going to happen without the other. Ideally, making that actually occur is easier said than done, but it is going to take outside-of-the-box thinking and I see number two as a concrete movement to that. Here is outside-of-the-box thinking that there's already a process set up for.

Dr. Perryman, Ph.D.: I think what precipitated this idea is, I believe, it was 2023. We gathered a lot of horses in 2022. 2023 was not so good. I may be getting my dates mixed up, but one of the years right in there.

Ms. Pearson: We didn't have the capacity.

Dr. Perryman, Ph.D.: We didn't have the capacity for them so there weren't as many animals gathered. I think what the Board's concern was is that, "Okay, we couldn't gather so that means we couldn't do anything." And so a plan that would

alternately balance the use of fertility control under those circumstances would hopefully reduce the number of maybe not foals in that next given year.

But in the next year, certainly, you could make up a little bit of ground by getting a little bit more into the fertility side of things. I think that's what precipitated is because otherwise, if you don't have any capacity one year and then suddenly you don't have any capacity the next year, now you're a couple of years behind on it and you're back where you were two years ago. You haven't made any ground. I think that's what precipitated the idea.

Dr. Lenz, DVM: I think it's a good recommendation. I just wonder, to wordsmith it, rather than saying, "Application should be prioritized," whether it should say, "Fertility control should be continued."

Ms. McAlpine: No. No.

Dr. Lenz, DVM: What you're saying is that even if there's not holding space, they still need to continue applying fertility control in these horses, right?

Dr. Perryman, Ph.D.: Or maybe "increased fertility control" above where it had been.

Dr. Lenz, DVM: Yeah.

Ms. McAlpine: "Application of increased fertility control should be prioritized." Actually, I like that. "Application of increased fertility control should be prioritized as a tool to stabilize population growth in every HMA." And of course, my broken record is going to say, "for both sexes" and I know I'm going to get shot down, but I believe it should start to say "for both sexes."

Ms. McAlpine: I don't think that we need increased because I think when we're saying prioritized, that implies it. And I was just going to add that we also wanted to stress in this that fertility control shouldn't just be used in HMAs where the population is already at AML, but it should be used everywhere regardless of gathers and removals.

Ms. Pearson: Right. And on that point, if we don't have capacity in holding facilities for gathers and removals, then that money and those resources should be spent on fertility control that year, regardless. I mean, we can prioritize where it needs to be or where it can be, but if they can't be gathered in one year, then they should be applying more fertility control.

Ms. Carlisle: All right. We're going to go to the next one. I wish you guys were here. "The Board recommends that the BLM acquire a contractor for developing an immediately implementable 2025-onward fertility control management protocol framework to maintain AML at the 45 HMAs currently at or near AML."

Ms. McAlpine: Do you want to just maintain AML or do they need to be below AML? I'm just thinking of those charts that we looked at. If we maintain AML at the top line, there's never any room for any growth.

Ms. Carlisle: BLM, you can fill in here. Forest Service, I think you have the same parameters. But AML is actually a range. There's a low and a high. Depending on the population growth rate of that particular herd and the potential application or not, a fertility control is going to dictate whether the gather is to low or middle. I don't think it's ever gathered too high AML because they give a range so that there's a set of time, years, in-between for that population to grow to a point where then it triggers some sort of management action. So my point is I think it's already built into the term AML, what you're saying, Susan, and there's going to be wiggle room depending on the HMA or the territory and that particular population of animals.

Ms. McAlpine: So is the ideal low to mid? Or is the ideal maximum AML?

Ms. Carlisle: I don't think we make that call. I think that's for the agency.

Dr. Perryman, Ph.D.: The legal term is a range. It is a range. AML, appropriate management level is a range. So if you maintain it, you have the room to move up and down within that range. I mean, that's implied in the term. So yeah.

Ms. McAlpine: Okay.

Dr. Perryman, Ph.D.: I think it covers your concern.

Ms. McAlpine: Okay.

Ms. Pearson: And I think this kind of goes to Barry, or Dr. Perryman, sorry. I'll be more respectful. This goes to the conversation and the question that Dr. Perryman asked. BLM, like what would you do if we were all of sudden magically at AML? I think everybody would be pretty content if we could maintain AML at these 45 HMAs right now.

And to me, that's a huge achievement. And do we have a plan? And if we don't have a plan, then we better get one on the ground right now. And if BLM can do it, fine. If not, we hire it out, like how we've contracted with USGS or whatever to do the pop, those kind of things.

I think that's a longer version of our recommendation, but that's kind of the idea behind it.

Ms. McAlpine: The only thing that I am thinking of, based on a day and a half of conversations, is the fact that some well-spoken public comments indicated that funding for nonprofits who are cooperating with BLM to do dotting and fertility control is going to be reduced or ended. Do we want to address that at all?

Ms. Carlisle: Why would that be? I'm not sure I follow you, Susan. The implication of this recommendation would be that potential -

Ms. McAlpine: No, I'm not talking about in that -

Ms. Carlisle: Okay.

Ms. McAlpine: I'm not talking about in that recommendation. The recommendation itself is fine. It was the Nevada Wild Horse Conservation talked about the fact that grants to nonprofits who are involved with roundups and helping with fertility control are losing their grant money, as something separate.

Ms. Carlisle: Okay. I remember now. And yeah, we talked about this a little bit yesterday. I was like, "Is this a concern?" I don't know any information about that. I feel like I can't weigh in either way.

Ms. McAlpine: Can Sharif, I see his name, is he still here? Can he weigh in? Is that a reality?

Ms. Carlisle: Let me find out. Let me check my incident command set up.

Commissioner Higbee: You know, something we're failing to address here is we've talked about fertility control and bringing the numbers down, but bottom line should be what the ranges look like and what the ecology is, what it looks like, what the forages are, and the condition of the animals.

I mean, it comes to a point where some of these HMAs, and we haven't even talked about the horses that are not even on the HMAs, that have strayed off, and Virginia herd is one of them. That's a state herd. I can talk to it a little bit because

they come and talk to NACO about once a month, or every quarterly or something. And up till now they've done a pretty good job of keeping the growth numbers down. But their numbers, they're saying, "Well, their numbers have went down." Well, they have, because there's 200 or 300 head that have strayed off, no longer on the HMA. They're off on somewhere else where they're not supposed to be at all.

Ms. Carlisle: The management decisions about prioritizing gathers do take that into account. I mean, I don't think they're ideal in anyone's mind because of all of the other interruptions that occur in emergencies and funding, but I don't think that that's not considered.

Dr. King Ph.D.: And also in this recommendation, I mean, we're talking about AML, which also presumably is taking the ecological conditions into account as well. So it's not going against that.

Ms. Carlisle: Right.

Ms. McAlpine: And I am kind of with Varlin in concern, and I think lots of all of us are concerned about the rangelands and what is happening there, and I am seeing this approach as part of that without mentioning it. I think we mentioned it a lot last year. And I'm seeing that as I am acknowledging that I believe the numbers, and that the numbers of wild horses and burros on the range is contributing to the degradation of the range. And I am really concerned about that as it impacts everything that survives on that range. I live in one of the worst places in the world, when you talk about everything dying right now in Arizona. When the cactus are even dying, it's pretty severe.

I agree with Varlin, and yet feel like these four have pretty much covered the intent. And I would not be unhappy if Varlin wanted to come up with something. And Barry, we'll let Barry and Jim come up with something specifically for the rangeland issues. I mean, I like the idea of, I don't know who said it, was talking about declaring rangeland in a state of emergency. With all the fires and the drought and everything else, we have fallen off the cliff with regard to the environment. I agree with you, Varlin. I would not be unhappy if somebody wanted to come up with something. I would help support that.

Commissioner Higbee: We're a little late in the game to do that. I think we better stick with what we got. We got meetings coming up in the future. Maybe we ought to address them.

Dr. Perryman, Ph.D.: Varlin, I think you're right. I know in the recent past we have made numerous recommendations about rangeland health and the problems with the overpopulation of horses, particularly around late seasonal habitats in much of the inner mountain west. And that's where the big focal point is, is around these habitats in late summer, early fall, riparian and other meadow type habitats, sub-irrigated habitats that all the wildlife require to maintain their populations.

And so that's been the focal point. We've made several recommendations, as I said earlier, and I think we've covered that. We've established it. I think most everyone understands that now, much better, I think, than they did at one point in time, and we can move on from that subject. But if it does come up again, this body will convene again shortly, and we can always address that at our next meeting as well. So as Varlin said, I would forego it at this point in time, at this particular meeting.

Commissioner Higbee: Well, it was those recommendations that brought us to give the Bureau of Land Management the opportunity to do emergency gathers. Before it wasn't. They had to go through a complete NEPA process to do an emergency gather, and by then it's too late.

Dr. Perryman, Ph.D.: Yes.

Commissioner Higbee: It's been addressed in prior Boards.

Dr. Perryman, Ph.D.: Madam Chair, it's back to you.

Ms. Carlisle: I think we're okay. Roughly, I'm going to, apologies, I didn't think about this earlier, but in recommendation number four, do we want to add or just modify slightly that it's dedicated facilities in the Central Eastern US to support the online corral as well? Because one of the issues that the BLM's online corral has is the ability to put enough animals on that that can be marketed out east and to have a place for that to all be coordinated from. So in essence, we're telling them to investigate the feasibility for Forest Service and BLM in calling out each of the different issue areas. So it's just clarifying for the particular piece of BLM that is a little bit of a lost opportunity.

Ms. McAlpine: I'm good. Go ahead.

Ms. Carlisle: So let me... Hang on. Sorry, Tracy. Let me look at where to put that.

Dr. Perryman, Ph.D.: Yes, I would like to see it.

Ms. Carlisle: To be located specifically in the, let's say, Central-Eastern US. Oh man, I was trying to figure out how to say this.

Ms. Pearson: Something which would also support the online corral.

Ms. Carlisle: Which would support the online BLM's online corral. I don't know if we need to say Forest Service and BLM. Oh, we say Forest Service.

Ms. Pearson: We say it all in the front.

Dr. King Ph.D.: But isn't that two different things?

Ms. Carlisle: Yeah.

Dr. King Ph.D.: So at the moment it's looking just like one thing.

Dr. Perryman, Ph.D.: Yeah, I'm starting to bull up on that, I think.

Ms. Carlisle: You think it covers it already?

Dr. Perryman, Ph.D.: Yes. I think it covers it already.

Ms. Pearson: I do too.

Dr. Perryman, Ph.D.: Cut out the Central. I think it would cover everything that you explained already. I really do.

Ms. Carlisle: Okay. To the agencies. It covers all of that.

Ms. Pearson: This is what we mean. Not just what we said, just read our minds. This is what we mean.

Ms. Carlisle: Yeah, read our minds.

Ms. McAlpine: Right. Read the transcribed notes.

Ms. Carlisle: Okay. All right. So potentially we're in a good place. Let me look at our time for a moment. Okay, we've got time.

Ms. McAlpine: I have 3:24, so you must be around 2:24.

Ms. Carlisle: 2:24. All right. Let me just look at our agenda. We should have a little bit of time. We don't need a lot, but our subcommittees could report out briefly on things that we have discussed that I think all guide us towards these recommendations, and then we will finalize these. Does that work for everybody? Does everybody need two or three minutes to get situated and get their subcommittee notes out in front of them, or are we good to go right away?

Ms. Ortiz: If we just want to take a five-minute break.

Ms. McAlpine: I'm good.

Ms. Carlisle: Okay. Let's take a five-minute break. I can get... Oh no, you don't need this in front of you because we have this. All right. If we could just take a fifteen-minute break.

Ms. McAlpine: Yep.

Ms. Ortiz: We'll return at 2:30 then, and then we'll get everything situated, figured out.

Ms. Carlisle: Okay. Thank you. That work for you all online? We'll see you in a bit.

[5-minute break]

Advisory Board Discussion and Finalize Recommendations

The group shared and discussed the final recommendation.

Mr. Kuechle: Okay, welcome back everybody, and thanks for bearing with us as the Advisory Board worked through their recommendations that we'll wrap up with here at the conclusion of our meeting here today. What we'll do is turn it back over to the chair, Celeste Carlisle. We'll do some report outs from the various subcommittees and the work that they've done within the Advisory Board. We'll get to the recommendations and then do some closing remarks. Celeste?

Ms. Carlisle: Thanks and welcome back. Do we have our online crew? Are they all back and... Oh, yes. I see you all over there.

We have three subcommittees on the Board that meet in the lead up to the Advisory Board meetings to do homework, essentially, to find out if there's information we need to make sure we have before the meeting, to make sure the Board just sees a list of the types of things we want to make sure we don't inadvertently leave out during the meeting. It's a way of having a bullet list of things to make sure that we get through them at these meetings. The three subcommittees each have a chair that guides this discussion and sort of makes sure and shepherds that process through, that we don't miss out on something inadvertently. And the three subcommittees are broad enough to sort of cover the gamut.

We have an ecosystem approach to management subcommittee, an organization and collaboration committee looking at the agency's structures and how you interact with that up and down the chain and as outside potential partners, and then we have a humane handling and communication subcommittee. We're going to just have the chairs go through some of those discussion points that the subcommittees had so that the Board can be aware of them. They may not be things that we can dig into at this particular meeting, but they are definitely things that are on our radar for upcoming meetings.

I'm going to go ahead and have Jim kick us off with the ecosystem approach to management subcommittee and talk us through that and who's on your subcommittee.

Commissioner French: Great. Thanks, Madam Chair. A lot of the material that we went through started with the last meeting that I was involved with on this subcommittee, and so some of this carried over. But also a lot of this is recommendation or regulatory recommendation oriented from our standpoint. And basically what I meant by that was, from a regulatory standpoint.

A good example, a fire event, a large fire event on an HMA, for instance. A lot of the reclamation work and/or if there was even a decision to do any reclamation work on those events, the agencies themselves actually seemed to shift gears toward the management that is most critical at that time, whether it be endangered species or whether it be some of the other regulatory changes that have come out of their administration. A good example would be the, as I said, with the fire event. In many cases, if there was a recommendation for the type of aggressive fire management or suppression management, it was centered around the species that would be impacted from a critical habitat standpoint.

And a good example of that in my part of the country was greater sage-grouse. In some cases, the Lahontan cutthroat trout, a threatened species, or something along the line of a pygmy rabbit or something like that. And that would generally dictate how the agency would move forward with, initially, the protection of the critical habitat, if they had the opportunity to do so, in the form of an overhead team. But secondly, it would center around the reclamation work, the planning, the bear team planning.

The reason I bring this up today and get it out on the table, is I always felt that it was easy to talk about the species of choice at the time, sage-grouse or Lahontan cutthroat trout, but we rarely talked about horses. We rarely talked about the impacts of horses on an HMA. I couldn't recall a single time we actually talked about the implications of horses that were two or three times over AML, with regard to at what point does that dictate management protocol? And so I felt that we really needed to talk about that horses need to, and HMAs needed to be incorporated in all of that management, regardless of whether or not there was a threatened species, or an endangered species, or a species of concern involved.

And that went right down the line, in terms of not only the management protocol, in terms of whether or not we're going to do something on critical habitat, but also in seed mix, in talking about recommendations that may drive the agency toward one type of reclamation versus another, and having a robust discussion in terms of whether or not we anticipated problems with being successful in a reclamation work.

I think, ultimately, we tried to incorporate some of this. In terms of our recommendations here, the interim management guidelines that usually come out of an agency following a large stochastic event of some variety, some type, needs to incorporate all of the users out on the mountain and all of the potential impacts from those users. An example that I spoke about many times, and it went back a number of years in my time as a biologist, but I can remember one large fire, for instance, that we had up on the Idaho/Oregon/Nevada corner, and it was on the Owyhee Desert, and it burned a very large piece of winter range. And at that time, there was a pretty robust population of horses on an HA up there that consisted of a bunch of horses that moved off of an HMA.

Following that event, we were talking about all the things we needed to do in order to try to stabilize those populations and try to put management in place that was going to have some level of success or probability of success. So the Department of Wildlife at the time, we issued a bunch of depredation tags, and we shot a whole bunch of mule deer and pronghorn off of that area out there, because we knew those animals were going to be standing on a winter range that didn't exist any longer, and there was going to be some significant starvation issues there. The Bureau suspended the AUMs for the livestock operator was on that same area, and starting at two years, and probably more than that, depending on how that reclamation moved along, and we didn't do anything with the horses that were there. We walked away from it.

And what it boiled down to is it did not allow for an emergency action on the part of the agency. They did not have that in place at the time. We spoke of that situation a number of times over the years, and I think, ultimately, we touched that today with that recommendation.

Also, with regard to the operational recommendations and whatnot that we could make out of here would have to do with, rather than talking about horses as an afterthought following, for instance, the development of an RMP, we felt that there ought to be a robust conversation about where you are with AML and whether or not the RMP should reflect that.

And that is, operationally, I think the Bureau has moved along quite away toward that over the years, but I think, from a standpoint of a recommendation from this Board, we felt that it would be good from a transparency perspective and a Board perspective to get that all on the table and actually have a discussion about it.

We bounced that around for quite a little while. Well, I'll just leave it at that. I think, ultimately, from a operational planning standpoint and a long-term planning standpoint, we felt that that would be a good place for us to at least make some recommendations down the road. These comments just now represent, outside of the comments that produced our recommendation that showed up here.

Mr. Oliver: I think that's a great discussion to have because we don't. We don't think about it. We always deal with it as an emergency after the fact instead of trying to understand what could happen and what's that going to leave us with. We're facing that situation in Oregon after the fires just last summer out there, working with the BLM on an area that was burned significantly, the amount of land that was covered.

And we're in a position where we're scrambling to try to figure out what do we do, right? Wildlife, you can up your numbers and hunt them a little more intensely, and reduce numbers, and others are just going to move out because there's nothing left for them. That's not the case with the horses. What do we do with something like that? It's a different situation that the general populace doesn't think about. And then when it comes down to, "Okay, what are we going to do?" We're trying to find a place where we could move these horses. We're taking this wild population, rounding them up, going to move them somewhere for a period of time until things have a chance to recover and then move them back on.

It doesn't make a lot of sense at all that we ended up where we ended up. Why were we not thinking about this ahead? And it's almost impossible to because of how far over AML, right? We've lost all our flexibility when we've lost the ability to work within that AML. It's critical. Look at what's happening now with the fire. The governor said that we had fire in November, fire in December, now we have fire in January. There's no fire season anymore. There's fire on the landscape and we're living with that fire and what's left over afterwards. You have to have some sort of concept, some thought, some process to think through not just what happens from the native populations and the wildlife out there, but what's that horse population going to do and what does it mean to them, that scenario and the potential for recovery of that critical piece of ground out there?

Commissioner French: Yeah. The other thing, I didn't mention that kind of follows that same line, we have some major, major shifts with regard to use on public lands, having to do a sage-grouse management, the adoption of the 2014-15 land use plan amendment that effectively closes, what? Almost 20 million acres of ground out there in the entire Great Basin. Actually, it restricts recreational use and access on the ground. In terms of travel management plans, it is going to have significant impacts with regard to livestock operations and other uses on public lands. And no conversation in that, in terms of HMAs. And it was all designed, ultimately, to protect critical sage-grouse habitat long-term through a period of recovery. And I really think it's important that horses need to be a part of that equation, and I just think it's an afterthought, that point.

Ms. Carlisle: Off-topic, Chuck Oliver joined us a day late for the meeting after heroic efforts to get here. We did introductions yesterday, and Chuck, you weren't here, but Chuck, if you could give us your, who are you?

Mr. Oliver: All right, thanks. Yeah, some snow in DC does amazing things to the infrastructure and the potential to travel out there, so it took a while to get here. Anyway, Chuck Oliver. I am with the Forest Service. I am deputy director for the Natural Resource Program for the agency, and the Wild Horse and Burro Program falls within the Natural Resource Program.

Ms. Carlisle: We're glad that you made it and that you worked so hard to get here. Are there any comments, or does anybody else on that subcommittee want to weigh in? Do we want to move to the next report out? Good to go? Thank you, Jim. That was, as usual, kind of mind-bogglingly real.

If we could have Dr. Perryman led us through as chair of the structure and organization... I'm misremembering the name of this committee. Looking at the overall structure of the agencies and how various collaborative entities around the outside work with them and how... I think that's about it. Dr. Perryman can talk about it.

Dr. Perryman, Ph.D.: Sure. Just a couple of words about some, I don't know, emerging issues, current issues that we had some conversations about. And again, these are conversation bullet points that help us get to recommendations, both during this meeting and future meetings as well.

But the first point that I think is obvious for everybody is that, during this transition of administrations that we're in the middle of right now, the Wild Horse and Burro Program is additionally challenged and constrained to some degree by current and pending retirements within the Program. People are moving around from one position to another position in life, and these changes in key leadership positions within the division that carry with them the designation of acting position person.

There are, and we all know this, that no matter how well someone is doing their job as an acting person, they lack some *je ne sais quoi*, I want to see what the minutes say on that one, that is necessary to really be able to make some of the decisions and carry the authoritative weight and leadership. And sometimes that's all we can ask for, is someone to sit in a position that's an acting position. But we discussed the importance of as soon as possible getting these transitions filled in the first place, and then getting them filled and changed from acting designations to actual designations for that position.

That's a concern. It may not seem as important to some folks as it was to our subcommittee, but we believe it's something that we really want to encourage the incoming administration to deal with, to fill these positions and fill them quickly and fill them with not just acting people on details, but actually fill the positions in a permanent way. And we'll be monitoring that. We'll see what happens in the future here in the next several weeks, and we'll be paying attention to it. And so we thought that was something that we ought to at least address, anyway. And the second thing, and this will be the last thing for us, is we wanted to make sure, from time to time it's good to stop and see what you're talking about and whether or not it's really the problem.

We tend as human beings to begin to think in linear fashion, with linear thinking rather than in non-linear thinking. In going about things in a linear way, we lose sight of reality quite frequently. So I spent a lot of time over the last 20 years teaching sort of non-linear approaches to issues, ecological issues. And it was already said earlier in our meeting that our problem, if we can call it a problem... Our challenge I think is a better term. Our challenge is controlling reproduction. And yet, not all of our efforts, but most of our efforts are geared toward dealing with production without actually dealing with the reproduction problem.

And one could, I guess, successfully argue to a degree that removing mares or removing pregnant mares in a gather process is dealing with the reproduction problem in some way. But the emphasis, and it's a subtlety, but it's an important subtlety, our emphasis needs to be on trying to work with reproduction, controlling reproduction rather than dealing with the consequences of reproduction, which is how we've been doing business since 1971.

And so we have more technology today. We have more insights. We have more science to bring to bear on the problem. We have PopEquus. We had a great presentation on PopEquus the other day. We have fertility control methods that are

being refined. We need delivery methods that are to be more refined, but we're moving in that direction. And so it's not all doom and gloom, but sometimes we need to just stop and say what is our challenge? And our challenge really is reproduction.

I'm not saying that production, dealing with the production, is not a challenge, because it is. We run out of space from time to time, but the real problem, until we get a handle on reproduction, production is still going to be a challenge and a challenge that is greater than it really needs to be.

With that said, those are a couple of things that we talked about. We have a number of recommendations that are about to pop up here that deal with the reproduction challenge, and I think we've made some headway in that direction. But we thought it prudent to talk about reproduction versus production and how they are interlinked. So with that said, I'll yield back. I'm happy to answer any questions if there are any, and we will move on from here. So Madam Chair, I yield back my time.

Ms. Carlisle: Anybody else want to add to that? I think none of us ever want to follow Barry with anything. And then Dr. Lenz is our chair for our Humane Handling and Communications Subcommittee, and Dr. Lenz, could you report out on some of the things that were discussed there?

Dr. Lenz, DVM: Sure. All right, Humane Handling, we're mainly focused on the welfare of the horses. One thing we didn't talk much about but I think it's important to point out is that Paul and Scott and Jerry with their welfare audits and so forth are doing a really good job in a real difficult situation. And I think sometimes it's difficult if you're in a meeting and people are critical of what you're doing and how you're working and so forth to take it personally. And I think they need to be commended on an impossible job. I know I first went on this Advisory Board, I remember talking to one of them and saying, you probably have the worst job in America because it just keeps getting harder.

We talked a little bit about that, but the main thing we were focused around was fertility, as Dr. Perryman said earlier, because the current strategy to get our horses and burros, to try to reduce the herds, the AML, and then implement fertility control isn't working. I don't think there was much doubt that it would ever work, because you have to remove a lot of animals, and I know the plan was to remove around 20,000 or so a year, and I think in '23, if my memory's right, they were successful. But then the numbers went down in '24, and I know in '25 they're planning on 10,000 removals, which will set them behind because these herds exponentially grow when the daughters of the mares and their daughters will have foals that are daughters, and they just go on and on from there.

We discussed the fact that there's good progress in adoptions, but most of the animals are still being held in long-term holding facilities, which is unsustainable because eventually we're going to reach the point, if we're not there already, that either there are no longer going to be any additional long-term pastures available or the federal government, Congress, is going to stop funding this. At some point, some administration is going to put their foot down and say this has got to stop. And I'm worried about, and so is the subcommittee and everybody on this Advisory Board, about what could happen to the horses, not just on the range but in the holding facility, if that day ever comes, and that day may come. So I think most of what we discuss is wrapped up in at least two of the recommendations that we're going to put forth today. And that pretty well wraps up what we talked about. Anybody else who's on the committee, feel free to add some additional comments.

Ms. Carlisle: Think you summed it up pretty well. We're all at that sort of quivery point, I think, of being fearful, so if ever there was a time to get our act together, now would be that time. And in the interest of time, we're going to move right into the recommendations as we believe they're going to go forward and hope they're going to go forward. Let's go ahead and have them up so we can all read them.

Ms. Carlisle: All right, we're just getting our ducks in a row, as usual. Anything before we get started? We going to go one by one? Okay. First recommendation, and just as a sideline, we, and apologies to Forest Service, we speak about these

recommendations as if they're only for BLM but we have added Forest Service into the recommendations that are appropriate for that. That's the only change from what occurred in the working group discussions earlier.

Number one, the Board recommends in 2025 that the US Forest Service and the BLM create detailed, measurable five-year plans describing how they will incrementally reduce population size and growth in order to ultimately achieve range-wide AML. The plan should prioritize application of fertility control administered remotely and or in concert with gather removals. Do we have a motion to approve?

Commissioner French: So moved.

Ms. Carlisle: Do we have second?

Ms. McAlpine: Second.

Ms. Carlisle: All approved?

Participants: Aye.

Ms. Carlisle: Anyone not approving? Which is not the right way to say that. All right, let's move on to number two. The Board recommends in 2025 and going forward, even if removals are constrained by availability of off-range holding space, application of fertility control should be prioritized as a tool to stabilize population growth in every HMA or wild horse territory. This should include HMAs or WHTs where AML has not been achieved and should be applied by gather, hold, release, and or by remote darting. Do we have a motion to approve?

Dr. Perryman, Ph.D.: Madam Chair, I move that we approve.

Ms. Carlisle: Okay.

Commissioner Pearson: I'll second that.

Ms. Carlisle: Okay. All approved.

Ms. McAlpine: Can I make a comment?

Ms. Carlisle: Oh, yes, go ahead, please.

Ms. McAlpine:

Okay. The only comment I have on this, it is not to change this at all, but I want to make sure that I put right out there my firm belief that when we talk about fertility control, fertility control does not mean only the mares. Fertility control should be prioritized for both sexes. Other than that, call for a vote, please.

Ms. Carlisle: Okay. I call for a vote. All approved say aye.

Participants: Aye.

Ms. Carlisle: It's all in favor.

Ms. Carlisle: All in favor. Thank you. I'm so sorry. I'm a little tired.

Ms. Carlisle And all opposed.

Ms. Carlisle: And all opposed. Thank you. That's the word. All right. The motion is approved. Number three. The Board recommends that the BLM acquire a contractor for developing an immediately implementable 2025-onward fertility control management protocol framework to maintain AML at the 45 HMAs currently at or near AML.

Commissioner Pearson I'll make a motion to approve this.

Ms. Carlisle: All right, we have a motion to approve.

Ms. McAlpine: I second.

Ms. Carlisle: We have a second. All approved say aye.

Board: Aye.

Ms. Carlisle: All opposed? All right. The motion is carried. I'm going to learn by the fourth one. The Board recommends to the Secretaries of Agriculture and Interior, the Chief of the Forest Service and the National Director of the Bureau of Land Management, the Board recommends the formation of an interagency task force slash planning group during the 2025 calendar year to investigate the feasibility and cost benefit of an inter-agency wild horse and brood adoption center slash facility to be located specifically in the eastern United States. I think the only thing we need to do is remove the Board recommends twice. I think we just say "to the Secretaries of Interior".

Ms. McAlpine: The Board recommends, yeah.

Ms. Carlisle: Right.

Ms. Carlisle: Okay. Sorry about that. Didn't catch it earlier. All right, so as corrected, do we have a motion?

Commissioner French: I move to approve.

Ms. Carlisle: Move to approve.

Ms. McAlpine: Second.

Ms. Carlisle: Second. All in favor?

Board: Aye.

Ms. Carlisle: All opposed? All right, all four recommendations have been approved and are unanimous. Now, thank you, everybody. Relatively painless for us. Hang on, I just need to check my notes. We have a few more little housekeeping things to do before we pass it back to Bryant. Let me look at my notes.

Wrap up and Adjourn

Before the meeting adjourned, the Board chose to honor Dorothea Boothe for her years of service to the Wild Horse and Burro Program. The Board also recognized Paul McGuire for his contributions to the Program.

Ms. Carlisle: First and foremost, Dorothea, we are so deeply appreciative of the work you have done for and with this Board. Dorothea is moving on to another committee. We are not pleased, but we understand. Unfortunately, the entire Board was not here to sign this card, but they sign it in spirit for sure.

And we have one more recognition. We have someone who has been involved in the Wild Horse and Burro Program for a long time and has been someone that I think all of us have relied upon for good long-term institutional memory information. He is so easy to talk to about the Program and how to think about it and how to progress through so many policies and mandates, and he does so gracefully and with grace. And Paul McGuire is retiring soon. Weeks? Three weeks?

Mr. McGuire: Three weeks.

Ms. Carlisle: Three-ish weeks. And we just want to recognize that he has been in this Program for a very long time, has worked very hard, has worked very hard with the Board, and we will miss you greatly, and thank you very, very much for all that you've done for this Program, and I'll just selfishly say and for us.

Mr. McGuire: Well, thank you, Celeste.

Ms. McAlpine: Thank you, Paul, from Arizona.

Mr. McGuire: I will say I'm not sure anyone has ever used the word "gracefully" to describe anything that I've done, but I appreciate it nevertheless. It's been a tremendous run, about 20 years with this Program, and working with the Board for most of that time in different capacities. So I appreciate your involvement, your insights, welcoming input and feedback from us to help with your deliberations and the recommendations that you develop for us. So thank you very much. I appreciate it. I'll look forward to observing from afar how things proceed and progress, and I know that with the advice of this expert group of folks, the Program will do well in the future. So thank you so much.

Ms. Carlisle: Thank you, Paul. Before we wrap it up, Sharif Branham is going to weigh in on a few things here, and then we'll officially shut things down. So, Mr. Branham.

Mr. Branham: Thanks, Celeste. Before I give my closing comments, I also want to acknowledge Dorothea and Paul. Dorothea, the wealth of knowledge you bring to the federal advisory committee process, to our Horse and Burro Advisory Board specifically, has helped me so much. Your willingness to educate me on all aspects of my role and also be so supportive and forward-thinking about what does the Board need, what does the designated federal official need, and just be there for every step of the way, it's been a sincere pleasure to work with you, and I really appreciate all that you bring to the table.

We're definitely going to miss you in this capacity, and I know you're going to be working with us in a different way, but certainly what you brought to the table in this regard is seemingly very much appreciated and as a model for those who have to come fill your very big shoes in that regard. So thank you so much for that.

Paul, I say every time I actually listen to Paul and we talk, we've had a lot of good conversations about the Wild Horse and Burro Program, I always in the back of my mind think as we're having these conversations, "This guy is just so smart." That's one of the things that's always in the back of my mind, because we talk about things, I have my bright ideas about what I think we should be doing, and half the time you've already thought about it or done many of those things or have reasons why it can be done or can't be done and how are we going to get it done? Well, Paul has been a very effective, I feel like a very effective not only teacher about the nuances of it but the conveyor of the institutional knowledge, me being relatively new to BLM. I'm only a little over a year in, I guess, a year in three or four months.

And it's been good to be able to benefit from the knowledge that Paul brings to the table and the practical aspect of it. It's like it's not knowledge for the sake of knowledge. Its knowledge applied in a way that actually advances the Program. We've had to rely on Paul's leadership in not only his normal job in the off-range capacity, but numerous times in the acting division chief role. And Paul has been always there every step of the way, even if it's something that he says, "Hey, I don't think this is the best path, but if this is what you want me to do," we have a conversation about it, and we figure out how do we get there, right?

And even this particular situation where there's bad weather and illnesses and all sorts of things, Paul made sure he was there to represent the Bureau, represent the Program, and very effectively. As we were participating in this meeting, I was very impressed by how Paul was able to not only convey the Program's position, the Bureau's position, but also be responsive to the questions in a way that we needed to express what the Bureau was trying to accomplish and where we're going with the Program.

Paul, I sincerely appreciate all you've brought to the table. You will definitely sorely be missed. And I'll say, in the back of my mind I was hoping, "Maybe he'll say he's not actually going to leave at the end of the month." I recognize you have a well-earned retirement, so certainly I'm not going to try to keep you from it, but the time you've been here, your tenure has been, the Bureau's benefited greatly from your tenure, and certainly you'll be missed, and in any capacity you would want to come back and serve the Program, we certainly will welcome it. Thank you both for your service to the Bureau and to the Wild Horse and Burro Program.

On a slightly different topic, just for context and for those who are wondering about tomorrow, for many of you may know already, but I'll just state this regarding the President Biden's executive order released on December 30th naming tomorrow, January 9th, as under executive order, tomorrow will be a national day of mourning for those in federal service, so for the nation, a day of mourning for President Jimmy Carter, who was a hundred years old and passed away. He's lying in the state in Washington, D.C., so many federal employees will be observing that day. I hope tomorrow's field trip goes very well.

But you'll certainly see there's probably fewer folks from the federal side who will be in attendance just because of that presidential executive order. So just wanted to make sure that folks are aware that it's not a reflection or lack of interest or commitment to the Program for those who are not going to show up. It's just that there's many of us who will be observing that day. But with that, I could do closing comments, but Celeste, was there anything else we didn't get to speak to before closing comments?

Ms. Carlisle: I will just thank the huge number of people that make these meetings occur, and just to give you an idea of what that means, that means in particular, Teresa and Chuck from Forest Service and Paul who sat up here patiently with us, the three of you, through this meeting, Paul from BLM obviously, and then all of the Forest Service and BLM staff that are here that help us in our conversations, that answer questions, that give presentations, and that are just here to support their colleagues and us in this process and the public. I also want to thank The Langdon Group in particular for their assistance in every way, including sometimes very quietly on the side, but casting us hand signals and announcements and "you got to do this" and "you got to be here," and then also moderating our conversations up here.

APHIS sending Dr. Al Kane is always great. The AV and IT crowd that, talk about the quiet little mouses in the back of the room, you guys, we know you're doing the bulk of the work, and you're just ever-present and silent. You're the most dangerous.

Law enforcement, that there was a hefty presence of, we are grateful to. Thank you for being here. The Board, obviously. I am always astounded that I get to sit up here with you all. I don't understand that. The staff of the Lions Gate Hotel and the Officer's Club here. And really, the public, these meetings are for you. They are part of that interaction. We do feel that one of the most important parts of our charter is to act as a liaison between the public and the agencies. I know sometimes it comes across a little stilted, and sometimes you might be incredibly frustrated, but we do honestly take that role very seriously. Thank you to everybody. We do deeply appreciate that it takes a lot of you to be here and make this

happen and to make it happen within the parameters that you have for making it happen. So really, really appreciative. Mr. Branham, I'll hand it back to you for your closing comments, and then we'll close out. Thanks.

Mr. Branham: Great. Thank you Celeste, and thank you to the Board for participating in these two days of healthy discussions about the management of Wild Horse and Burros and for your meaningful recommendations. I also want to thank our BLM and US Forest Service staff for putting this meeting together and all the work it took to pull it off in such a short timeframe, and also putting up with the changes based on weather and other challenges that we experienced. The event went off very well, and I appreciate that.

A big thank you also to our audiovisual team from the BLM National Training Center. I know it took a great deal of staff to support this offsite meeting. And thank you all for serving on this Board. The work you do is important and so appreciated. I impartially enjoy watching you work over the last couple of days, discussing the issues of America's wild horses and burros, and appreciate the Board's efforts to find practical solutions.

Also. I want to speak to the comments earlier, about the need for making sure that there's permanent people in these positions. I one hundred percent agree with you. One of my important priorities is to try to make sure we have permanent fills in these positions as soon as we can, recognizing that some of these things are out of our control at the career staff level. That is always one of my priorities, and we do have some folks lined up to try and come into some of these positions as fast as we can. So thank you for those comments and feedback. We agree. And again, thank you everyone for your dedication and services to this overall effort and your longstanding interest in protecting the health of the landscape and the horses that depend on it. Celeste, going to hand back to you.

Ms. Carlisle: A final thank you, truly, from the bottom of my heart. Be well, everyone. Meeting adjourned.

Adjourn

Day 2 Adjourned